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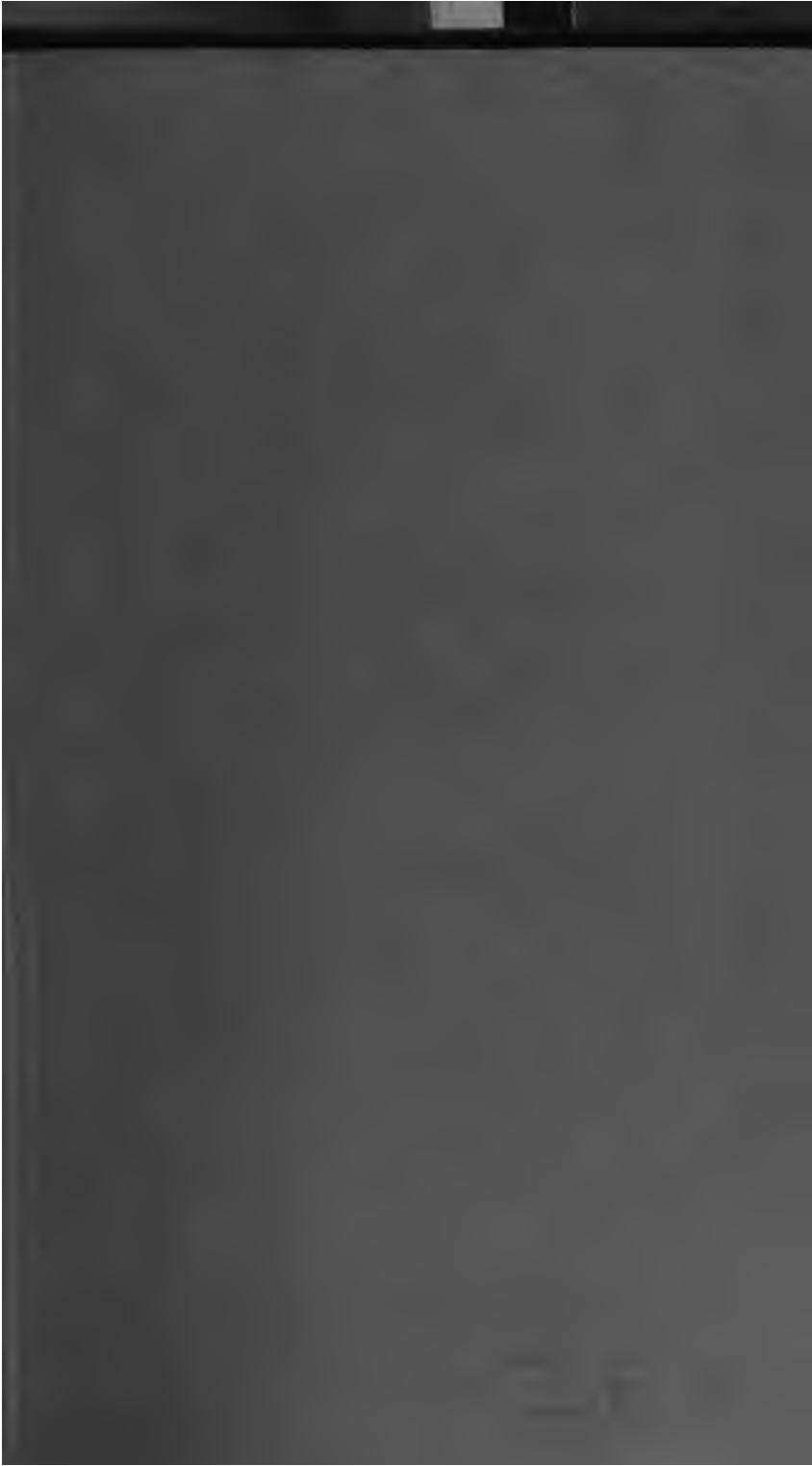
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A  
V I E W

OF THE PRINCIPAL

DEISTICAL WRITERS

THAT HAVE APPEARED IN ENGLAND IN THE LAST AND PRESENT  
CENTURY.

WITH

OBSERVATIONS UPON THEM,

AND

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE ANSWERS

THAT HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED AGAINST THEM.

*IN SEVERAL LETTERS TO A FRIEND.*

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THE FIFTH EDITION.

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By JOHN LELAND, D.D.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

A VIEW OF THE PRESENT TIMES,

WITH REGARD TO RELIGION AND MORALS, AND OTHER IMPORTANT  
SUBJECTS,

By W. L. BROWN, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF MARISCHAL COLLEGE, PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY, AND  
MINISTER OF GREYFRIARS CHURCH, ABERDEEN.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I

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## P R E F A C E.

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**N**O man that is not utterly unacquainted with the state of things among us can be ignorant, that in the last, and especially in the present age, there have been many books published, the manifest design of which was to set aside revealed religion. Never in any country where Christianity is professed, were there such repeated attempts to subvert its divine authority, carried on sometimes under various disguises, and at other times without any disguise at all. The most noted writers on that side have been at liberty to produce their strongest objections; these objections have been retailed by others; and many seem to take it for granted, that Christianity hath received very sensible wounds by the several attacks that have been made upon it, and that they have greatly hurt its credit, and weakened its authority.

But whosoever will be at the pains impartially to examine those of the deistical writers that have hitherto appeared among us, and to compare them with the answers which have been made to them, will find, that upon a nearer view they are far from being so formidable as some have been apt to apprehend. And since there are few that have leisure or patience for a particular inquiry into the several writings which have appeared in this controversy, some judicious persons, who wish well to the interest of our common Christianity, have been of opinion,

that it might be of real service to give a summary view of the most noted books that have been published against revealed religion for above a century past, together with proper observations upon them. From such a view, the reader might be enabled to form some notion of the several turns this controversy hath taken, how often the enemies of revealed religion have thought proper to change their methods of attack, the different disguises and appearances they have put on, and the several schemes they have formed, all directed to one main end, viz. to set aside revelation, and to substitute mere natural religion, or, which seems to have been the intention of some of them, no religion at all, in its room.

Upon such a comparison between those that have attacked Christianity, and those that have written in defence of it, it would appear, that if it be really true, that deism and infidelity have made a great progress among us, it must have been owing to something else than the force of reason and argument; that the Christian religion is in no danger from a free and impartial inquiry; and that the most plausible objections which have been brought against it, though advanced with great confidence, and frequently repeated, have been fairly and solidly confuted. Such a view would make it manifest, that the enemies of Christianity have not generally behaved as became fair adversaries, but have rather acted as if they judged any arts lawful by which they thought they might gain their cause. And yet notwithstanding their utmost efforts for above a century past, they have really been able to say but little against the Christian religion, considered in its  
original

original purity, as delivered by Christ and his apostles, or to invalidate the solid evidences by which it is attested and confirmed.

For these reasons it hath been judged, that a short and comprehensive view of the deistical writers of the last and present age might be of great use. And as the course of my studies hath led me to be conversant in several of those writings which have been published on both sides in this important controversy, it was urged upon me, by some persons for whom I have a great regard, to undertake this work. There was one great objection, which hindered me for some time from attempting it, and which still appeareth to me to be of no small weight, and that is, that as, according to the plan that was formed, it would be necessary to give an account of the answers published to the books I should have occasion to mention, this would oblige me to take notice of some of my own. I am sensible how difficult it is for an author to speak of his own performances, in such a manner as not to intrench upon the rules of decency. If he give a favourable character of them, this will be interpreted as a proof of his vanity, any appearance of which is usually turned to his disadvantage. And on the other hand, if he should make no mention of his own books at all, where the nature of the design in which he is engaged makes it proper for him to mention them, this might perhaps be censured as a false and affected modesty. It is no easy matter to keep clear of these extremes; and, for this reason, it would have been a particular pleasure to me to have seen this work undertaken by another hand; but as this hath not been

done, I have chosen rather to attempt it myself, than that a work, which I cannot but think might be of real service, should be neglected. It cannot be expected, that a distinct notice should be taken of all the writers that have appeared among us against revealed religion for this century past. This, if it could be executed, would take too large a compass, and be of no great use. A view of the principal of them, or, at least, of those who have made the greatest noise, may be sufficient. And the design is not to give an historical account of the authors, or of their personal characters, but to give some idea of their writings, which alone we have properly to do with.

The method proposed, and for the most part pursued, is this: The several writers are mentioned in the order of time in which they appeared. Some account is given of their writings, and of the several schemes they have advanced, as far as the cause of revelation is concerned. And great care has been taken to make a fair representation of them, according to the best judgment I could form of their design. Some observations are added, which may help to lead the reader into a just notion of those writings, and to detect and obviate the ill tendency of them. There is also an account subjoined of the answers that were published; not all of them, but some of the most remarkable, or such as have come under the author's special notice. And very probably some have been omitted, which might well deserve to be particularly mentioned.

This may suffice to give a general idea of the following work; at the end of which there are some reflections subjoined, which seem naturally to arise upon such a view as

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is here given. Observations are made on the conduct of the deists in the management of the argument. And the whole concludes with a brief representation of the evidences for the Christian religion, and its excellent nature and tendency.

What has been now laid before the reader, is taken from the Preface to the first edition: and it gives a just account of the original nature and design of this work, which was at first intended only to make up one volume. But not long after the publication of it, I was put in mind of a considerable omission I had been guilty of, in making no mention of Mr. Hume, who was looked upon to be one of the most subtle writers that had of late appeared against Christianity. About the same time was published, a pompous edition of the works of the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, in five volumes quarto, the three last of which seemed to be principally intended against revealed, and even against some important principles of what is usually called natural religion. Some persons, for whose judgment and friendship I have a great regard, were of opinion, that, to complete the design which was proposed in publishing the *View of the Deistical Writers*, it was necessary to take a distinct notice of the writings of Mr. Hume and Lord Bolingbroke: and that in that case it might be of use to make more large and particular observations upon them, than could properly be done where a number of writers came under consideration. This produced a second volume, which, though it had the same title with the former, viz. *A View of the Deistical Writers*, yet differed from it in this, that it did not contain strictures and observations upon a  
variety

variety of authors, but a large and particular consideration of the only two there examined, viz. Mr. Hume and the late Lord Bolingbroke, especially the latter. And this was judged necessary, considering his Lordship's high reputation as a writer, and that there are scarce any of the objections against Christianity which he hath not repeated and urged in one part or other of his works, and that with a peculiar confidence, and with all the strength of reason and vivacity of imagination he was master of. And as I then thought I had finished the design, that volume ended with an *Address to Deists and professed Christians*, which appeared to me to be a proper conclusion of the whole.

But after the second volume was published, some letters were sent me, relating both to that and the former volume, which put me upon reconsidering some things in them, and making farther additions and illustrations, which I thought might be of advantage to the main design. These were thrown into a *Supplement*, which made up a third volume, and was published separately for the use of those who had purchased the two former.

I am now called upon to publish a new edition of the whole in a smaller letter, which reduces the work to two volumes. The chief difference between this and the former edition in three volumes is this: that the *Supplement*, which before made a distinct volume, is now taken into the body of the work: the several additions and illustrations are inserted in the places to which they respectively belong: and all that related to one author is laid together in a continued series. To render that part of the work which relates to Lord Bolingbroke more complete, there  
are

are subjoined to it, the *Reflections on the late Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History*, which were republished in the Supplement, with considerable additions and improvements, though without the political part. The *General Reflections on the Deistical Writers*, together with the *Summary of the Evidences for Christianity*, were originally placed at the end of the first volume, then intended to be the only one. But now that the whole is published together in two volumes, it is judged they will come more naturally in the second volume of this edition; where also is placed, the *Address to the Deists and professed Christians*, which properly concludes the work; and the *Reflections on the present State of Things in these Nations* are added by way of *Appendix*. It gives me some concern, that this work is become so much larger than was at first intended, which I am afraid will prove a disadvantage to it, and disgust or discourage some readers. But I hope favourable allowances will be made, considering the extent of the design, and the variety of matters here treated of. I believe it will appear, that there are few objections which have been advanced in this controversy, but what are taken notice of in the following work, and either sufficiently obviated, or references are made to books where fuller answers are to be found.

May God in his holy providence follow what is now published with his blessing, that it may prove of real service to the important interests of religion among us, to promote which, as far as my ability reaches, I shall ever account the greatest happiness of my life. And it should be the matter of our earnest prayers to God, that all those

who



who value themselves upon the honourable name and privileges of Christians, may join in united efforts to support so glorious a cause, in which the preservation and advancement of true religion and virtue, the peace and good order of society, and the present and eternal happiness of individuals, are so nearly concerned.

I have nothing farther to add, but that in this as well as the former editions, the whole is conducted in a series of letters, which were written to my most worthy and much esteemed friend, the reverend Dr. Thomas Wilson, rector of Walbrook, and prebendary of Westminster, in the form in which they now appear.

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VIEW



A  
V I E W  
OF THE  
DEISTICAL WRITERS, &c.

IN SEVERAL LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

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L E T T E R I.

*Some Account of those that first took upon them the Name of Deists.—Lord Herbert of Cherbury, one of the most eminent deistical Writers that appeared in England in the last Age—His Attempt to form Deism into a System—Observations upon his Scheme, and upon the five Principles in which he makes all Religion to consist—It is shewn that the Knowledge of them was very imperfect and defective in the heathen World; and that a Revelation from God for clearing and confirming those important Principles might be of great Advantage.*

DEAR SIR,

I NOW enter upon the task you have enjoined me, the giving some account of the principal deistical writers that have appeared among us for above a century past. The reasons given by you, and other judicious friends, have convinced me that such a work might be of use, if properly executed; we only differed as to the fitness of the person that was to execute it. My objections have been overruled; I must therefore set about it as well as I can: and if I were sure that others would look upon this attempt with the same favourable eye that your candour and friendship for me will incline you to do, I should be in no great pain about the success of it.

The name of Deists, as applied to those who are no friends to revealed religion, is said to have been first assumed about the middle of the sixteenth century, by some gentlemen in France

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and

*about the year 1505*

and Italy, who were willing to cover their opposition to the christian revelation by a more honourable name than that of atheists. One of the first authors, as far as I can find, that makes express mention of them, is Viret, a divine of great eminence among the first reformers, who in the epistle dedicatory prefixed to the second tome of his *Instruction Chretienne*, which was published in 1563, speaks of some persons in that time who called themselves by a new name, that of deists. These, he tells us, professed to believe a God, but shewed no regard to Jesus Christ, and considered the doctrine of the apostles and evangelists as fables and dreams. He adds, that they laughed at all religion, notwithstanding they conformed themselves, with regard to the outward appearance, to the religion of those with whom they were obliged to live, or whom they were desirous of pleasing, or whom they feared. Some of them, as he observes, professed to believe the immortality of the soul; others were of the *Epicurean* opinion in this point, as well as about the providence of God with respect to mankind, as if he did not concern himself in the government of human affairs. He adds, that many among them set up for learning and philosophy, and were looked upon to be persons of an acute and subtle genius; and that, not content to perish alone in their error, they took pains to spread the poison, and to infect and corrupt others, by their impious discourses and bad examples\*.

I leave it to you to judge, how far the account this learned author gives of the persons that in his time called themselves deists is applicable to those among us who take upon them the same title, and which they seem to prefer to that of christians, by which the disciples of Jesus have hitherto thought it their glory to be distinguished. That which properly characterizes these deists is, that they reject all revealed religion, and discard all pretences to it, as owing to imposture or enthusiasm. In this they all agree, and in professing a regard for natural religion, though they are far from being agreed in their notions of it. They are classed by some of their own writers into two sorts, mortal and immortal deists†. The latter acknowledge a future state: the former deny it, or at least represent it as a very uncertain thing: and though these are, by some among themselves, represented under a very

\* See Bayle's Dictionary, article Viret.

† Oracles of Reason, p. 99.

disadvantageous character, and as little better than atheists, they are, it is to be feared, the more numerous of the two. Indeed some of their most eminent modern writers seem to be very easy about these differences. With them all are true deists who oppose revelation, whether they own future rewards and punishments or not: and they speak with great regard of those disinterested deists who profess to pursue virtue for its own sake, without regard to future retributions\*.

In giving an account of the deistical writers that have appeared in these nations (for I shall not meddle with those of a foreign growth), I shall go back to the former part of the last century: and the first I shall mention, and who deserves a particular notice, is that learned nobleman, Lord Edward Herbert, Baron of Cherbury. He may be justly regarded as the most eminent of the deistical writers, and in several respects superior to those that succeeded him. He may be also considered as the first remarkable deist in order of time, that appeared among us as a writer in the last century; for the first edition of his book *de Veritate* was in 1624, when it was first published at Paris. It was afterwards published at London, as was also his book *de Causis Errorum*, to which is subjoined his treatise *de Religione Laici*. Some years after this, and when the author was dead, his celebrated work *de Religione Gentilium* was published at Amsterdam, in 1663, in quarto; and it was afterwards re-printed there in 1700, octavo, which is the edition I make use of; and an English translation of it was published at London in 1705.

His Lordship seems to have been one of the first that formed deism into a system, and asserted the sufficiency, universality, and absolute perfection, of natural religion, with a view to discard all extraordinary revelation as useless and needless. He seems to assume to himself the glory of having accomplished it with great labour, and a diligent inspection into all religions, and applauds himself for it, as happier than any Archimedes †. This universal religion he reduceth to five articles, which he frequently mentioneth in all his works. 1. That there is one supreme God. 2. That he is chiefly to be worshipped. 3. That piety and virtue are the principal part of his worship. 4. That we must repent

\* See Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 332, 333. ed. 8vo.

† De Relig. Gent. c. 15. init.



of our sins; and if we do so, God will pardon them. 5. That there are rewards for good men, and punishments for bad men, in a future state: or, as he sometimes expresseth it, both here and hereafter. These he represents as common notices inscribed by God on the minds of all men, and undertakes to shew that they were universally acknowledged in all nations, ages, and religions. This is particularly the design of his book *de Religione Gentilium*; though it is but comparatively a small part of that work which tendeth directly to prove that these articles universally obtained: the far greater part of it is taken up with an account of the heathen religion and ceremonies, which he hath performed with an abundance of learning, and hath intermixed many softening apologies for the pagan superstition and idolatry.

As he represents these five articles as absolutely necessary, the five pillars, as he calls them, on which all religion is built; so he endeavours to shew that they alone are sufficient, and that nothing can be added to them which can tend to render any man more virtuous, or a better man. But then he subjoins this limitation, “provided these articles be well explained in their full latitude\*.” This universal religion which all men agree in, his Lordship represents to be the only religion of which there can be any certainty, and he endeavours to shew the great advantages that would arise from men’s embracing this religion, and this only. One of the reasons he offers to recommend it is this, that this catholic or universal religion answers the ultimate design of the holy scriptures. “*Sacrarum literarum fini ultimo intentionique quadrat.*” He adds, that “all the doctrines there taught aim at the establishment of these five catholic articles, as we have often hinted; there is no sacrament, rite, or ceremony there enjoined, but what aims, or seems to aim, at the establishment of these five articles.” See his reasons at the end of his *Religio Laici*.

One would be apt to think by what this noble writer here offers, that he must have a very favourable opinion of Christianity as contained in the holy scriptures; since he represents it as the great design of all its doctrines, and even of the rites and sacraments there enjoined, to establish those great principles in which he makes religion properly to consist. Accordingly he ex-

\* Appendix to Relig. Laici, qu. 3d.

precisely declares in the above-mentioned treatise, that it was far from his intention to do harm to *the best religion*, as he there calls Christianity, or the true faith, but rather to establish both\*.

But I am sorry that I am obliged to say, that, notwithstanding these fair professions, his Lordship on all occasions insinuateth prejudices against all revealed religion, as absolutely uncertain, and of little or no use. He inveigheth promiscuously, as many others have done since, against all pretences to revelation, without making a distinction between the false and the true. He often speaks to the disadvantage of *particular* religion, which is a name he bestoweth on the Christian religion, and any revelation that is not actually known and promulgated to the whole world: and he representeth it as containing doctrines, which disgust some men against all religion, and therefore is for recommending what he calls the universal religion, as the best way to prevent men's having no religion at all. And particularly he insinuates, that the Christian religion granteth pardon on too easy terms, and derogateh from the obligations to virtue†: a reflection which is manifestly owing to a misapprehension or misrepresentation of the doctrine of Christianity on this head. So he elsewhere supposeth, that the faith there required is no more than a bare assent to the doctrines there taught; though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that the faith on which so great a stress is laid in the gospel-covenant is to be understood of a vital operative principle, which purifieth the heart, and is productive of good works; and that the necessity of true holiness and virtue is there strongly inculcated. The charge he advanceth against Christianity might be more justly retorted upon himself, who, though he mentions it to the praise of his universal religion, that it giveth no licence to sin, but bindeth men strictly to the severity of virtue, yet to shew what reason sinners have to hope for pardon, offereth several pleas and excuses that tend to extenuate the guilt of sin. Particularly he urgeth, that men's sins are not for the most part committed out of enmity against God, or to cast dishonour upon him, but with a view to their own particular advantage or pleasure, and are chosen by them under the appearance of some

\* Relig. Laici, p. 28.

† See the appendix to his Relig. Laici, qu. 6.

good\*. And in his book *de Veritate* he declares, that those are not lightly to be condemned, who are carried to sin by their particular bodily constitution; and he instances particularly in the rage of lust and anger; no more than a dropical person is to be blamed for his immoderate thirst, or a lethargic person for his laziness and inactivity. He adds indeed, that he does not set up as an apologist for wicked men, but yet that we ought to pass a mild censure upon those who are carried to sin by a corporeal and almost necessary propensity to vice. *Neque tamen me hic confederati cujusvis patronum fisco; sed in id solummodo contendo, ut mitiori sententia de iis statuamus, qui corporea, brutali, & tantum non necessaria propensione in peccata prolabantur.* This apology may be carried very far, so as to open a wide door to licentiousness, and would soon introduce a very loose morality.

But not to insist upon this, I would observe that the principal design of his treatise *de Religione Laici* seems to be to shew, that the people can never attain to any satisfaction as to the truth and certainty of any particular revelation, and therefore must rest in the five articles agreed to by all religions. This particularly is the intention of his fourth and fifth queries in the appendix to that treatise. In his fourth query he supposes, that the things which are added to those common principles from the doctrines of faith are uncertain in their original; and that though God is true, the Laics can never be certain that what is pretended to be a revelation from God is indeed a true revelation from God. In his fifth query he urgeth, that supposing the originals to be true, yet they are uncertain in their explications. To this purpose he takes notice of the multiplicity of sects among Christians; and that the Laics can never be sufficiently sure of the meaning of the revelation, concerning which there are so many controversies; that in order to arrive at any certainty in these matters, it would be necessary either to *learn all languages, to read all the celebrated writers, and to consult all those learned men that have not written*, a method which is manifestly absurd and impracticable; or else to have recourse to a *supreme judge of controversies* appointed by common consent.

It is an observation that will undoubtedly occur to you on this

\* De Relig. Gentil. p. 268. Dr. Tindal talks in the same strain. Christ. as old as the Creat. p. 32. ed. 870.

occasion, that his Lordship here maketh use precisely of the same way of talking, to shew that the Laics can have no certainty about any revelation at all, which the writers of the Romish Church have frequently urged to shew the necessity the people are under to rely entirely upon the authority of the Church or Pope, because of the difficulties or the impossibility of their coming to any certainty in the way of examination or private judgment. But if the Laity cannot be certain of revealed religion, because of the controversies that have been raised about the articles of it, for the same reason it may be said, that they can arrive at no certainty with respect to his Lordship's catholic universal religion: for though he representeth men as universally agreed in the five articles in which he makes that religion to consist, it is undeniable that there have been great controversies about them; and that the modern deists, as well as ancient philosophers, are divided in their sentiments in relation to them, especially when explained, as he requireth they should be, in their full latitude. He ought not therefore to make a thing's being controverted to be a proof of its uncertainty, and that men can come to no satisfaction about it: a principle which he and other deists often insist upon, but which manifestly leads to universal scepticism. But this is not the only instance, in which arguments have been brought against Christianity, that in their consequences tend to subvert all religion, and all evidence and certainty of reason.

From this general view of Lord Herbert's scheme, it sufficiently appears that his design was to overturn all revealed, or, as he calls it, particular religion, and to establish that natural and universal religion, the clearness and perfection of which he so much extols, in its room, as that which alone ought to be acknowledged and embraced as true and divine.

I shall now freely lay before you some observations that have occurred to me in considering the scheme of this noble author.

One is this, that he hath carried his account of natural religion much farther than some others of the deists have done. It were to be wished, that all that glory in this character would agree with this noble Lord in a hearty reception of those articles which he representeth as so essentially necessary, and of such vast importance. These he would have to be explained in their full extent, and that except they be properly explained they are not

sufficient. Thus explained, they include the belief not only of the existence, but the attributes of God; of some of which, in his book *de Veritate*, he gives a good account, and of his providence and moral government. He asserts, that God is to be worshipped, and that this worship includeth our offering up to him our prayers and thanksgivings\*; that piety and virtue are absolutely necessary to our acceptance with God: and he particularly urgeth the necessity of observing the ten commandments: that we are obliged to repent of our sins in order to our obtaining forgiveness, and that this repentance includeth both a sorrow for our sins, and a turning from them to the right way. He also insisteth upon the belief of the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments, in which God will recompense men according to their actions, and even according to their thoughts†. These things he supposeth to be common notices, so clear that he can scarce be accounted a reasonable creature who denieth them. And yet I am afraid, if all these things are to be looked upon as necessary, many that call themselves deists will be as loth to admit his Lordship's natural and catholic religion, as christianity itself. There is reason to apprehend, that some of their strongest prejudices against christianity arise from its setting those principles in too clear a light, and enforcing them in too strong a manner. It is true, that when they are for putting a fair gloss upon deism, and asserting the sufficiency and perfection of natural religion abstracted from all revelation, they are willing to have it thought that their religion includeth the belief of those important articles. They are then obliged to have recourse to his Lordship's system, and the arms he hath furnished them with; but at other times they make it plainly appear that they are far from being fixed in these principles. His Lordship declares, that it is necessary these articles should be well explained: but indeed they are expressed in very general and indefinite terms, and there is no great likelihood of their agreeing in the explications of them. It is a thing well known, that many who have made no small figure among our modern deists have denied some of his Lordship's five articles, at least taken in the extent in which he seems willing to understand them. God's moral government and particular providence; his worship, especially as it includes prayer and praise; man's free

\* *De Veritate*, p. 271, 272.

† *De Relig. Gentil.* p. 283.

agency, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions, have made no part of their creed. Some of them have been far from pleading for that strictness of virtue which his Lordship tells us natural religion obliges men to; and, instead of urging the necessity of repentance, have, after Spinoza, represented it as a mean, an unreasonable, and wretched thing\*. And the rewards and punishments of a future state have been exploded under the notion of bribes and terrors, a regard to which argueth a sordid and mercenary temper of soul, inconsistent with a true and generous virtue.

Another reflection that it is proper to make on Lord Herbert's scheme is this: that these five principles, in which he makes his universal religion to consist, were not so very clear and well known to all mankind, as to make an external revelation needless or useless. His Lordship indeed supposeth them to be common notices, inscribed by a divine hand in the minds of men; and accordingly he sets himself to prove, with a great shew of learning, in his book *de Religione Gentilium*, that these principles were universally believed and acknowledged by the people in all ages, countries, and religions. But any man that carefully examines his book will find, that all that he really proves is no more than this; that there were some imperfect vestiges of these important truths preserved among the Gentiles, and that the knowledge of them was never absolutely and totally extinguished, which will be easily allowed. But he has not proved, that the people, or even all those that passed for wise and learned, had a distinct knowledge and assurance of those principles, especially if taken in their just extent. The testimonies he hath produced by no means prove such an universal agreement: what he seemeth principally to rely upon is the reasonableness and evidence of the principles themselves, which he supposeth to be so plain, that no rational man can be ignorant of them. Thus he declares, that he would sooner doubt whether the beams of the sun shone upon those regions, than suppose that the knowledge of God, the evidences of whose existence and perfections are so obvious from his works, did not enlighten their minds†. And he cannot be persuaded, that any of them worshipped the sun as the chief

\* *Pœnitentia virtus non est, sine ex ratione non oritur: quem facti pœnitentet bis miser seu impotens est.* Spin. Eth. Pt. 4. Prop. 54.

† *De Relig. Gentil. p. 225.*

deity, because of the incredible absurdity of such a practice, which he well exposes\*. But when we are inquiring what men do in fact believe and practise, we are not to judge of it from what we apprehend it is reasonable for them to believe and practise.

If this were a proper place to take a distinct view of the proofs he hath offered in relation to his famous five articles, it would be no hard matter to shew, that, according to his own representation of the case, they were not so universally acknowledged and clearly known among the Gentiles, as to make a farther revelation and enforcement of them to be of no use or advantage. This might be particularly shewn with regard to the first and second of these articles, viz. That there is one supreme God, and that this God is to be worshipped; which are principles of the greatest importance, and which lie at the foundation of all the rest. Notwithstanding the pains he hath taken to excuse and palliate the pagan superstition and idolatry, and to prove that they worshipped the one true God, the same that we adore, under various names, and by various attributes; yet he owns, that what were at first only different names came, in process of time, as superstition increased, to be regarded and worshipped as different gods. It is plain, from express and formal passages, produced by him from ancient writers, that some nations worshipped no other deities but the sun, moon, and stars. When in the third chapter of his book *de Relig. Gentil.* he mentions the names of the Deity which were in use among the Hebrews, and shews that those names and titles were also used among the Gentiles; he owneth that the Hebrews appropriated these names and titles to the one supreme God, superior to the sun, but that the Gentiles understood by them no other than the sun itself. He thinks it indeed probable that the worship they rendered to the sun was symbolical, and that they intended to worship God by the sun, as his most glorious sensible image; and sometimes he is very positive that they did so, and that they rendered no proper worship to any but the supreme God; but at other times he speaks very doubtfully about it, and pretends not positively to assert it, but leaves the reader to his own judgment in this matter†. And elsewhere he acknowledges, that the people perhaps did not suf-

\* *De Relig. Gentil.* p. 27, 247.

† *Ibid.* p. 25. 310.

Sciently understand this symbolical worship. *Symbolicum illum cultum haud satis forsan intellexit*\*? It is indeed a little strange, that if the notion and belief of one only supreme God universally obtained among the Gentiles, none but the Hebrews should have made the acknowledgement of the One supreme God, the Maker and Lord of the universe, the fundamental article of their religion; and that in the laws of other states, particularly among the learned and polite nations of Greece and Rome, polytheism was established, and the public worship was directed to be offered to a multiplicity of deities. Many of the heathens, by his own acknowledgement, thought that the God they were to worship should be visible, and looked upon it to be incongruous, that he who demanded worship from all should hide himself from his worshippers †. And though it was a notion which generally obtained among them, that some kind of external worship was necessary to be rendered to their deities, yet as to the manner of their worship he doth not deny that some of the heathen rites were ridiculous, others absurd and even impious. To which it may be added, that some of their wisest men acknowledged, that they were ignorant of the proper manner in which God is to be worshipped, except he himself, or some person sent by him, should please to reveal it. There is a remarkable passage in Plato's second *Alcibiad*, which hath been often quoted. Socrates, meeting Alcibiades, who was going to the temple to pray, proves to him that he knew not how to perform that duty aright, and that therefore it was not safe for him to do it; but that he should wait for a divine instructor to teach him how to behave both towards the gods and men; and that it was necessary that God should scatter the darkness which covered his soul, that he might be put in a condition to discern good and evil. To the same purpose, Iamblichus, in *Vita Pythag.* c. 28. speaking of the principles of divine worship, saith, "It is manifest that those things are to be done which are pleasing to God; but what they are it is not easy to know, except a man were taught them by God himself, or by some person that had received them from God, or obtained the knowledge of them by some divine means."

The third article mentioned by his Lordship as universally

\* *De Relig. Gentil.* p. 293.

† *Ibid.* p. 26.



agreed on is, that piety and virtue are the principal part of God's worship. But not to urge that the proof he brings of an universal agreement in this principle seems to be very defective, this article would be of no great use, except men were also generally agreed as to the nature and extent of true piety and virtue. And it can scarce be reasonably denied, that a revelation from God, pointing out our way to us, and containing a clear signification of the divine will with regard to the particulars of the duty required of us, would be of great use. Lord Herbert himself, after having mentioned some virtues which were honoured among the pagans, acknowledgeth, that besides these there were many other things looked upon to be necessary to true piety, especially those things which shewed a devout or grateful temper towards the gods, and the observance of the public rites and ceremonies of religion\*; which is in other words to say, that the joining in superstitious and idolatrous worship (for such the established public worship was) made up a necessary part of the heathen piety and virtue, and was counted a principal ingredient in a good man's character.

As to the fourth article, that men must repent of their sins, and that if they do so God will pardon them, it might easily be shewn that the Gentiles were far from being agreed what are to be accounted sins; since some sins and vices of a very enormous kind were not only practised and pleaded for by some of their philosophers, but permitted and countenanced by the public laws, nor were they agreed what is included in a true repentance.—His Lordship himself acknowledgeth, that the ancients seldom used the word repentance in the sense in which we take it†; and that they did not look upon it to be an atonement for all crimes, but for those of a less heinous nature; and that they generally looked upon other things to be also necessary, and laid the principal stress upon lustrations, and the rites of their religion, for purifying and absolving them from guilt. And any one who duly considers, that the dispensing of pardon is an act of the divine prerogative, the exercise of which depends upon what seemeth most fit to his supreme governing wisdom, cannot but be sensible that it must needs be a great advantage to be assured, by an ex-

\* De Relig. Gentil. p. 250.

† Ibid. p. 268.

press revelation from God, upon what terms the pardon of sin is to be obtained, and how far it is to extend.

With regard to the fifth article about future rewards and punishments, which he representeth to be, as it really is, of vast importance, though he sometimes expresseth himself as if the heathens were generally agreed, that good men would be rewarded with eternal life; at other times he intimates that they only agreed in this, that there would be rewards and punishments in a future state; and sometimes, that they held this only, that there would be rewards for good men, and punishments for bad men, either in this life or after it. And he himself frequently owns in his book *de Veritate*, that what kind of rewards shall be conferred, or punishments inflicted, cannot be certainly known from the light of natural reason\*.

But we need not insist farther on these things. His Lordship himself fairly granteth, that the knowledge the Gentiles had of the One supreme God was lame and imperfect; which he attributes to the sloth or cunning of the Priests, who neglected to instruct the people, or instructed them wrong; and that from thence it came to pass, that, the rays of the divine light being intercepted, a wonderful darkness overspread the minds of the vulgar. "*Unde etiam factum, ut radiis divini luminis interceptis, miræ caligo vulgi animis obducta esset.*" And he observes, that by what was added by the priests, poets, and philosophers, the whole fabric of truth was in danger of falling to the ground. *Tota inclinata in casumque prona nutavit veritatis fabrica* †. And at the close of this book *de Relig. Gentil.* he owns, that at length the purer parts of divine worship being neglected, the whole of religion sunk by degrees into superstition: and that those five articles were almost overwhelmed with a heavy load of errors, so as to be perceived only by the wiser sort of men, *a perspicacioribus viris*, i. e. by those who had a penetration above the vulgar ‡.

Now this being a true representation of the case as it stood in fact, whatever it was owing to, it can scarce be reasonably denied, that if God should, in compassion to the corrupt and igno-

\* *De Veritate*, p. 57, & alibi.

† *De Relig. Gent.* p. 225. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 283. § *Ibid.* p. 310.

rant state of mankind, grant an exprefs revelation of his will, to clear and reſtore thoſe great principles which had been ſo much obſcured and perverted, to recover men to the right knowledge and worſhip of God, and to explain and enforce the main important parts of their duty, this would be of ſignal benefit to the world, and a remarkable proof and effect of his great goodneſs. His Lordſhip indeed, in ſeveral parts of his works, throws out hints and ſuſpicions as if either ſuch a revelation from God could not be given, or at leaſt that there can be no way of knowing, or being aſſured, that ſuch a revelation has been really given; but he no where offers any proof of it. The general inveſtives he ſo frequently makes againſt prieſts, oracles, impoſtures, prove nothing; except it be allowed to be a reaſonable principle, that becauſe there have been falſe pretenders to revelation, therefore there never was, nor can be a true one: a way of talking and reaſoning this, that might paſs among the inferior tribe of deiſtical writers, but which is abſolutely unworthy of his Lordſhip's ſenſe and learning. Whereas it may rather be gathered from it, that mankind in all ages have been generally perſuaded, that it was both poſſible for God to grant an extraordinary revelation of his will, and that, if he did, it would be of great advantage. Impoſtors have built upon this principle; but this doth not ſhew the principle itſelf to be falſe, which hath as good a title to paſs for a common notion, as ſome of the five articles which he repreſenteth to be ſo clear and univerſally acknowledged. The only reaſonable concluſion that can be drawn from the many impoſtures and falſe revelations which have been put upon mankind is, not that all pretences to revelation are falſe and vain, but that we ought to be very careful to diſtinguiſh the falſe from the true, and impartially to conſider and examine the proofs that are brought, and not to receive any revelation without ſufficient credentials of its divine authority. But it would be a moſt unreaſonable limitation of the divine power and wiſdom to affirm, either that God cannot make extraordinary diſcoveries of his will to particular perſons, in ſuch a manner that the perſons to whom they are immediately communicated may be certain that they came from God; or that he cannot commiſſion and enable ſuch perſons to communicate to others what they have received from him, or cannot furniſh them with ſuch credentials.

dentials of their divine mission, as may be sufficient to convince the world that they were sent of God, and to make it reasonable for others to receive the doctrines and laws which such persons deliver in his name. And it hath been proved, with great strength and evidence, that this hath actually been the case with regard to the christian revelation.

There are other reflections that might be made on Lord Herbert's system. But I am willing to give you and myself a little respite, and shall therefore reserve them to be the subject of another letter.

## L E T T E R    I I .

*Farther Observations on Lord Herbert's Scheme—The Philosophers not qualified to recover Mankind from the Darknefs and Corruption into which they were fallen.—The Usefulness of the Christian Revelation to that Purpose.—Its not having been universally promulgated in all Nations and Ages, no just Prejudice against it—Other Objections of Lord Herbert considered—Writers that have appeared against him.*

SIR,

**I**N my former letter an account was given of Lord Herbert's scheme; and it was shewn, that, taking the state of mankind and of the Gentile world as it really was, according to his own representation of the case, an express revelation from God, confirmed by his divine authority, for clearing and enforcing those articles which his Lordship supposeth to be necessary, would be of great use. I now add, that in fact the christian revelation hath been of signal advantage to the world, for giving men a clearer knowledge and fuller certainty of those important truths than they had before. Our noble author indeed speaks with admiration of the ancient philosophers, as capable of instructing men in a proper manner, if they would have attended to their instructions: but then he owns, that the people had little regard to the purer doctrine of the philosophers\*. And indeed I do not see how it could be expected, that they should place any dependance upon their dictates, which were for the most part regarded only as the tenets of their several schools, in which the people had little concern. They were not the ministers of religion, nor could pretend to any authority that should make them be regarded as the guides and instructors of mankind, or cause their opinions to pass for laws. The most eminent among them were contradicted by others of great name: many of them laboured to make all things appear doubtful and uncertain; and those of them that had the noblest notions frequently affected to conceal them, or

\* De Relig. Gentil. p. 310.

were

were afraid to divulge them. What Alcinous hath observed concerning Plato, with respect to the inquiry concerning the chief good, might be applied to some other matters of great importance. "That which is worthy of all honour, such as the supreme Good, he conceived not easy to be found, and, if found, not safe to be declared\*." His Lordship assurcth us, that the philosophers were always displeas'd with the superstitious worship of the people. But, if this was the case, they seem to have been very improper persons to reclaim them from it, since it was an universal maxim among them, and particularly recommended by one of the best of them, Epictetus, that every man ought to worship according to the laws or customs of his country †: And it is well known that their established worship was polytheism and idolatry. Varro, in a passage quoted by his Lordship, divides the heathen theology into three kinds: the *fabulous*, which belonged to the poets; the *physical*, which was that of the philosophers; and the *civil*. He speaks with disregard of the two former, and represents the last as that in which the people were concerned, and which alone could be of real use to them: and this he explaineth to be that which was established by the laws, and administered by the priests, and which shewed what gods they were publicly to worship, what rites they were to observe, and what sacrifices it was proper for any man to offer ‡.

If a reformation of the world by the philosophers was not to be expected, for the reasons now given, his Lordship will own it was not to be hoped for from the priests, against whom he bitterly inveighs, as the authors of all superstition, and of the great corruption of religion in the heathen world. And as little was it to be expected from the lawgivers and great men of the state, who generally patronized the established superstition, of which they themselves had been in a great measure the authors or promoters, and were ready to punish any that opposed it. And if there were any of them who were for reforming and correcting some abuses in the public superstitions, and exploding some of the grosser fables that were received among the people, as his Lordship

\* See Alcinous's Doctrine of Plato, c. 27. in Stanley's Lives of the Philosophers.

† Epict. Enchirid. c. 38.

‡ De Relig. Gent. p. 306, 307.

observes Mutius Scævola the chief pontiff, and Varro, were for doing, he owns that the attempts were vain and ineffectual, because the errors and superstitions were become inveterate\*. This being the true state of the case, it is hard to see what other method could be taken, that would prove so effectual to recover mankind from their superstition and idolatry, as the giving an extraordinary revelation, attended with sufficient credentials, to instruct men in the name of God, concerning the nature of true religion, to assure them of the certainty of its great principles, and to enforce the practice of its important duties by the strongest and most prevailing motives.

And accordingly, when Christianity appeared with the most illustrious attestations of a divine mission and revelation from heaven, it effected what no precepts or doctrines of the philosophers had been able to do. The pagan polytheism and superstition fell before it: and it hath actually produced this great advantage, that the principles upon which our author layeth so much stress have been better known and understood, and more universally acknowledged, than they were before. It is incontestable, that Christians are more generally agreed in those great principles, than ever men were in the pagan world. They are set in a clearer light, and men come to a greater certainty about them. That they are so far preserved among the Mahometans, was also originally owing to the light of the Jewish and Christian revelation. And it is very probable that his Lordship himself is very much obliged to Christianity, though he doth not acknowledge it, for the full persuasion he every where expresseth as to these important articles; several of which were denied by some, and doubted by others of the ancient philosophers.

Though therefore it is not to be wondered at, that those among the deists who have an aversion to these principles, when taken in their just extent, should be against Christianity, yet Lord Herbert, who asserteth them to be of such vast consequence, ought, one should think, to have been very thankful to God for having enforced them by an express and well-attested revelation, and given them a divine sanction. And if he were sincere in the acknowledgment he sometimes makes, that the explaining and en-

\* De Relig. Gen. p. 311.

forcing those great principles is the ultimate design of the holy scripture, to which all its doctrines, and even its rites and sacraments tend, he ought certainly to have entertained very favourable thoughts of Christianity, of its doctrines as well as precepts, and even of its rites and positive institutions.

But that which seemeth principally to have prejudiced his Lordship against Christianity is, that it is what he calleth a *particular religion*; whereas the true religion must be universal, and promulgated to all mankind. He frequently urgeth, that nothing less than such an universal religion as he pleadeth for can support the honour of God's universal providence, and the care he exerciseth towards the whole human race; which no particular religion can do; and that otherwise the Gentiles must be supposed to be universally lost and damned, which it were cruel and injurious to God to imagine. This is what hath been often urged and repeated by the deists since.

To this it may be justly answered, that those who maintain the Christian revelation may think as honourably as any others consistently can, of the universal care and providence of God towards mankind. No where is this more clearly asserted than in the sacred writings, which declare God's universal goodness and benignity towards the human race in strong terms; and that he hath been continually doing them good, and hath never left himself without witnesses among them. We must not indeed carry this so far as to assert, that all men have an actual knowledge of the great principles of religion, and of their duty, because we may imagine that the universal care of providence towards mankind requireth that it should be so; which seems to be the course of his Lordship's reasoning; for this is contrary to evident and undeniable fact and experience. But we acknowledge that God hath given to all men the principle of reason, together with a natural sense of right and wrong, which would be of great use to assist them in the knowledge of religion, and to direct them in the practice of their duty, (if duly cultivated and improved to the utmost that it is naturally capable of.) But besides this, Christians generally maintain, and the holy scriptures lead us to think, that God hath from time to time made extraordinary discoveries of his will to mankind; that some such discoveries were made to the first ancestors of the human race, who were bound by all obligations to transmit them to



their posterity; that therefore there was an original universal religion, embraced by the first parents of mankind, and transmitted from them to their descendants; that accordingly some of the most eminent ancient philosophers ascribed the knowledge and belief of some of the great principles insisted upon by this noble author, to a tradition derived from the most early ages, though his Lordship never maketh the least mention of tradition, as one source of that knowledge and belief of these things, which obtaineth among the nations; that this religion, which was both originally derived from revelation, and agreeable to nature and reason, was gradually obscured, and became greatly corrupted, though still some remarkable traces and vestiges of it remained among the Gentiles; that God was pleased, in his wise and good providence, to interpose by various methods, and by raising up excellent persons from time to time, to keep those remains of the ancient religion from being totally extinguished; that at last he was graciously pleased to send his Son into the world, a person of divine dignity and glory, to recover men to his true knowledge and pure worship, to direct and assist them in the practice of their duty, to shew them the true means of their reconciliation and acceptance with God, and to bring life and immortality into the most clear and open light; that this revelation was attended with the most illustrious attestations, and made a wonderful progress through a considerable part of the known world, and would have spread still farther, if it had met with such a reception as the excellency and importance of it well deserved; and finally, that as to those to whom it was actually communicated, God will deal with them in a just, a wise, and equitable way, and will make all proper allowances for any want of the advantages which others enjoy. The asserters of the Christian revelation are under no obligations to limit God's universal benevolence. They leave those that are destitute of this revelation to God's infinite mercy; and can think more favourably of their case, than those consistently can do, who will not allow that they were under any great darkness, and suppose them to have acted in manifest opposition to the most clear universal light.

The objection arising against the Christian revelation, for want of its being universally known and promulgated, hath been often considered and obviated, nor is this a proper place to enter upon  
a large

a large and particular discussion of it. At present it may be sufficient to observe, that the objection proceeds upon a wrong foundation, *viz.* that the universal goodness and benignity of the common Parent of the universe require that he should communicate his benefits to all his creatures alike, and in equal degrees. It is evident, in fact, that in the distribution of his benefits God acteth as a free and sovereign benefactor, dispensing them in very various degrees, always undoubtedly for wise reasons, but those reasons often not known to us. It cannot reasonably be denied, that he hath made some whole classes of beings vastly superior to others in valuable gifts and endowments, and capacities for happiness: and some individuals of the same class of beings are favoured with much greater advantages than others. And, if we look particularly into God's dealings with the human race, we may observe a very remarkable variety. Some are from the beginning endued with much greater natural abilities and more excellent dispositions, and are placed in a more favourable situation and happier circumstances. Some whole nations are eminently distinguished from others, not only with respect to many other advantages of human life, but with respect to the means of moral improvement, and are furnished with more excellent helps for making a progress in wisdom and virtue, and consequently in true happiness. All these differences between persons and nations are under the direction of divine providence, as all must own that acknowledge a providence, as his Lordship professeth to do. And those that are distinguished from others by superior advantages ought to be thankful to God for those advantages, and to ascribe them to his goodness, and not deny that God hath given them those advantages, because there are others that have them not, or not in an equal degree. Since therefore the distinguishing some persons and nations with valuable advantages above others is not inconsistent with the universal benignity of the great Parent of mankind (for if it were, he would not do it), it can never be proved, that he may not grant a revelation to any part of mankind, except at the same time it be granted equally to the whole world. Indeed, if all men every where were required actually to believe that revelation, and were to be condemned for not believing it, it would be necessary to have it universally promulgated; but since the actual belief of it is required of those only

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to believe it - and so on. 93

to whom it is actually published, and they to whom it is not made known are not put into a worse condition than if there had been no such revelation granted at all, no argument can be brought to shew that it is inconsistent with the divine wisdom or goodness, to grant such a revelation to some part of mankind, though it be not actually promulgated to the whole human race: especially if, in its own nature and original intention, it was fitted and designed to be of universal extent: which is the case of the Christian revelation. Those therefore who are so circumstanced as to have an opportunity of knowing it, ought to be very thankful to God on that account, and not refuse or reject their own advantages and privileges, because all others are not partakers of them as well as they. This would be a most absurd and irrational conduct.

I shall only further observe, that this author seems frequently to make it a great objection against what he calls *particular religion*, that it insisteth upon other things as necessary, besides the religion of nature, as contained in these five articles. Religion, according to him, is *notitiarum communium symbolum*\*, a creed containing common notions or truths: and these common notices he reduceth to the five above-mentioned. But will any man undertake to prove, that God cannot reveal any truths to mankind, but precisely these five articles, or that all useful religious knowledge is wholly absorbed in them? May there not be truths which, though not precisely the same with those articles, may be of great use for clearing and confirming them, for instructing men in the fuller knowledge of God, and of his will, and of the methods of his grace towards us, or for directing us in our duty, and animating us to the practice of it? And must all these be discarded at once, as of no use in religion, because they are distinct from the articles so often referred to? Or must a well-attested revelation be rejected, because it containeth some things of this kind? Our noble author himself, though he supposes these articles to be absolutely necessary, seems not to be quite sure that they are sufficient: for he observes, that God's judgments and proceedings are not fully known to any man: and therefore he will not take upon him positively to pronounce, that

\* De Verit. p. 55. 221.

these articles are sufficient. *Quam ob causam neque eos sufficere protinus dixerim*\*. But if they should be supposed to comprehend all that is required from the heathens, who never had the light of the Christian revelation, it doth not follow that they are also alone sufficient for those to whom this revelation is made known: for supposing God to give an extraordinary revelation of his will for restoring religion when greatly corrupted, and clearly directing men in the way of salvation, and helping forward their improvement in divine knowledge, and in a holy and virtuous practice, as it would be a signal advantage to those to whom such a revelation is given, so it must necessarily lay them under additional obligations. Some things would, in consequence of it, be necessary to be believed and done, by those to whom this revelation is made known, which they were not so expressly obliged to believe and practise before: and it would be a strange thing to complain against that revelation on this account, or accuse it of falsehood, and to choose rather to be without the signal advantage of such a revelation, and its glorious benefits, privileges, and hopes, than to be obliged to receive the discoveries it brings, and to practise the duties which result from them.

One of the first English writers that published animadversions on Lord Herbert's scheme (for I shall not take notice of what some learned foreigners have done this way) was Mr. Richard Baxter, in a book published in 1671, which he calls, *More Reasons for the Christian Religion, and no Reason against it*: and which he designed as an appendix to his excellent treatise of the reasons of the Christian religion. One part of this book contains, "Animadversions on a Tractate *de Veritate*, written by the noble and learned Lord Edward Herbert, Baron of Cherbury." This writer makes judicious reflections on several passages in that book, but takes no notice of his Tract *de Religione Laici*, nor of that learned work *de Religione Gentilium*, which probably he had not seen. The celebrated Mr. Locke, in his *Essay on Human Understanding*, hath some observations on Lord Herbert's five articles, to shew, that, however reasonable they may appear to be, they cannot be justly accounted common notices in the sense in which that Lord represents them; viz. as clearly inscribed by the

\* De Relig. Gentil. p. 293.

hand of God in the minds of all men \*. And in his *Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, he hath, without formally mentioning Lord Herbert, furnished a proper antidote against his scheme, by shewing, with great clearness and force, the usefulness of divine revelation, for setting the great principles of the law of nature, and the important duties of religion and morality in a strong and convincing light, and enforcing them with the most powerful motives; and that the mere natural unassisted light of reason was, as things were circumstanced, insufficient and ineffectual for that purpose †. This matter is also fully and distinctly treated in Dr. Whitby's learned work, intituled, *The Necessity and Usefulness of the Christian Revelation, by Reason of the Corruptions of the Principles of natural Religion among Jews and Heathens*. London, 8vo, 1705.

The only author among us, that I know, who hath formally considered the whole of Lord Herbert's scheme, and undertaken a direct answer to his writings, is the reverend Mr. Halyburton, professor of divinity in the university of St. Andrews, in a book which was published after the author's death, at Edinburgh, in 1714, 4to, intituled, *Natural Religion insufficient, and Revealed necessary to Man's Happiness*. — “ in which, particularly, “ the writings of the learned Lord Herbert, the great patron of “ deism; to wit, his books *de Veritate, de Religione Gentilium,* “ and his *Religio Laici*, in so far as they assert nature's light able “ to conduct us to future blessedness, are considered, and fully “ answered.” In this elaborate performance he sets himself largely and distinctly to shew that the light of nature is greatly defective, even with respect to the discoveries of a Deity, and the worship that is to be rendered to him; with respect to the inquiry concerning man's true happiness; with respect to the rule of duty, and the motives for enforcing obedience: that it is unable certainly to discover the means of obtaining pardon of sin; or to eradicate inclinations to sin, and subdue its power. And, lastly, he argues its insufficiency, from a general view of the experience of the world. He afterwards proceeds distinctly to consider the five articles to which the Lord Herbert reduces his

\* Essay on Human Understanding, book i. c. 3, f. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

† See his works, vol. ii, p. 574, & seq. 4th edit.

catholic religion. He answers the proofs his Lordship has brought to shew that these articles did universally obtain; and, on the contrary, offers several proofs to shew that they did not so obtain. And he endeavours distinctly to answer the principal arguments and pleas urged by Lord Herbert; and, after him, by Mr. Blount, for the sufficiency of natural religion. Whosoever carefully examines what this learned and pious author has offered on these several heads will find many excellent things; though the narrowness of his notions in some points hath prejudiced some persons against his work, and hindered them from regarding and considering it so much as it deserves.

I shall here conclude my account of Lord Herbert, in which I have been the more particular, because as he was one of the first, so he was confessedly one of the greatest writers that have appeared among us in the deistical cause.

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#### POSTSCRIPT.

*A remarkable Incident relating to Lord Herbert considered.*

SIR,

AFTER I had finished the two foregoing letters, I saw a large anonymous letter, which was sent to you, and by you communicated to me, relating to Lord Herbert of Cherbury. This letter deserves particular notice; and what I have to observe upon it may be properly inserted here, immediately after the observations which have been made upon that noble writer in the preceding letters. I readily agree with this gentleman in acknowledging, what, as he observes, Mr. Baxter owns in his animadversions on Lord Herbert's tract *de Veritate*, that there are excellent things in that book, and that many of the rules there proposed may be of great use. But I had no occasion to take particular notice of them, as I proposed only to make some general observations on his Lordship's scheme, as far as the cause of Christianity is concerned. I hope the writer of that letter, who appears to be a man of sense, and a friend to Christianity, as well as a great admirer of Lord Herbert, will find, on perusing the foregoing reflections, that I have done his Lordship justice, and not pushed the charge against him farther than there is just ground

ground for it. What I have there said is perfectly agreeable to what this ingenious gentleman has observed in this letter; where, after having said that Lord Herbert is commonly reputed to have been the first starter of deism in the last century, he adds, "Supposing the charge to be true, as I greatly suspect it is, yet I am convinced upon several good reasons, that he was nevertheless a deist of more honour, and of greater candour and decency, as he was of far greater parts and learning, than many that have appeared under that denomination since." He subjoins, "Had he lived in these days, wherein the subject, then new, has been thoroughly canvassed, and no stone left unturned to find out the truth, and bring it into fair light, I own I have charity enough to suppose, and almost to believe, that Lord Herbert would either have been an advocate for revelation, or at least have forborne opposing it."

This gentleman takes notice of a manuscript which he had lately seen, containing the life of the Lord Herbert of Cherbury, drawn up from memorials penned by himself, and which is now in the possession of a gentleman of distinction whom he does not name. He mentions that Lord's good conduct when he was ambassador at Paris, and some other things that do not come within the compass of my design, which is not to give an account of the lives and characters of the authors I mention, but only to consider their writings, and these no farther than they relate to the controversy between the Christians and the deists. But there is one thing in that manuscript life of Lord Herbert, which the writer of the anonymous letter calls a *surprising incident*, and which is indeed of such a nature, that I cannot pass it by without a particular notice.

After having observed that Lord Herbert's tract *de Veritate* was his favourite work, he produceth a large extract relating to it, in that Lord's own words, signifying, that though it had been approved by some very learned men to whom he had shewn it, among whom he mentions Grotius, yet as the frame of his whole book was so different from what had been written heretofore on this subject, and he apprehended he should meet with much opposition, he did consider, whether it were not better for him for a while to suppress it. And then his Lordship proceeds thus:

"Being thus doubtful, in my chamber, one fair day in the summer, my casement being open towards the south, the sun  
" shining

“ shining clear, and no wind stirring, I took my book *de Veritate*  
 “ in my hands, and, kneeling on my knees, devoutly said these  
 “ words. *O thou eternal God, author of this light which now*  
 “ *shines upon me, and giver of all inward illuminations; I do*  
 “ *befeech thee, of thine infinite goodness, to pardon a greater re-*  
 “ *quest than a sinner ought to make: I am not satisfied enough,*  
 “ *whether I shall publish this book: if it be for thy glory, I be-*  
 “ *seech thee give me some sign from heaven; if not, I shall suppress*  
 “ *it.* I had no sooner spoken these words, but a loud, though  
 “ yet gentle noise, came forth from the heavens (for it was like  
 “ nothing on earth); which did so cheer and comfort me, that I  
 “ took my petition as granted, and that I had the sign I demanded;  
 “ whereupon also I resolved to print my book. This, how  
 “ strange soever it may seem, I protest before the eternal God,  
 “ is true: neither am I any way superstitiously deceived herein;  
 “ since I did not only clearly hear the noise, but in the sereneft  
 “ sky that ever I saw, being without all cloud, did, to my think-  
 “ ing, see the place from whence it came.”

The ingenious writer of the letter says, he will make no remarks on this incident, but sends it as he finds it; but he makes no doubt, that some observations upon this and other things in that life would be acceptable to the friends of religion.

I shall mention some reflections that have occurred to me upon this occasion.

I have no doubt of his Lordship's sincerity in this account. The serious air with which he relates it, and the solemn protestation he makes, as in the presence of the eternal God, will not suffer us to question the truth of what he relates; *viz.* that he both made that address to God which he mentions, and that, in consequence of this, he was persuaded that he heard the noise he takes notice of, and which he took to come from heaven, and regarded as a mark of God's approbation of the request he had made: and accordingly this great man was determined by it to publish this book. He seems to have considered it as a kind of imprimatur given to it from heaven, and as signifying the divine approbation of the book itself, and of what was contained in it.

I cannot help thinking, that if any writer, zealous for Christianity, had given such an account of himself, as praying for and expecting a sign from heaven to determine his doubt, whether

he

*This by a letter in the margin of the original*



he should publish a book he had composed in favour of the christian cause; and upon hearing a noise, which he took to be from heaven, had looked upon it as a mark of the divine approbation, and as a call to publish that book; it would have passed for a high fit of enthusiasm, and would no doubt have subjected the author to much ridicule among the gentlemen that oppose revealed religion. What judgment they will pass upon it in Lord Herbert's case I do not know: but considering the great partiality they have often shewn in their own favour and against christianity, it is not improbable, that some of them may be apt to interpret this incident as giving a divine sanction to a book, which contains indeed several important truths, but withal hath some principles which are unfavourable to the christian religion; or at least, they may be willing to have it believed that this is as much to be depended upon as the signs and attestations said to be given from heaven to the first preachers and publishers of the gospel revelation.

There are some things observable in Lord Herbert's solemn address to God which, I think, are highly commendable, and would incline one to think very favourably of his Lordship's intentions. He discovereth in it a great veneration for the Deity, and a deep sense of his dependence upon him as the *author of light, and the giver of all inward illuminations*. This is agreeable to the sentiments of the best and wisest men in all ages; but yet I think it may be justly doubted, whether an address of such a particular kind as that made by his Lordship was proper or regular. It does not seem to me, that we are well founded to apply for or to expect an extraordinary sign from heaven, for determining doubts concerning the expediency of publishing a book. Methinks, if a man hath used his best endeavours to find out truth, and (which certainly ought not to be neglected) hath humbly applied to God to assist and direct him in his inquiries; if he hath the testimony of his own conscience to the uprightness of his own intentions, and that he is not actuated by pride and vain glory, by an affectation of singularity, or any worldly sinister ends and views; and if he is satisfied, upon the most diligent and impartial examination, that what he hath advanced is both true and of great importance to mankind, and is only afraid of the opposition it may meet with; I think, in such a case, especially  
if

if he hath also the advice of good and judicious friends concerning it, he hath sufficient grounds to proceed upon, and doth not need a particular sign from heaven to determine him. This seems to be a putting it on a wrong foot, since God hath not in his word given us any ground to expect that he will answer such a request; nor is there any reason to expect it from the nature of the thing. His Lordship himself seems to have suspected that such an address and expectation was not regular, when he begs of God to *pardon* it, as being a *greater request than a sinner ought to make*. I believe it will be acknowledged, that sudden impressions, or supposed signs from heaven, like that upon which Lord Herbert seemeth to lay so great a stress, are very equivocal, and not much to be depended upon for information in truth, or direction in duty: They may lay persons open to mistake and delusion. It cannot be denied, that, in such cases, men are in danger of being imposed upon by the warmth of their own imaginations, especially if they be wrought up to a strong desire and expectation of an extraordinary sign from heaven, in favour of a design which they heartily wish should succeed.

I think it is evident, from his own account of it, that this was Lord Herbert's case. His mind was full of his book, highly prepossessed in favour of its truth and usefulness. He seems not to have been diffident of the truth and goodness of the book itself, but only to have been in doubt about the expediency of its publication; and he took a very extraordinary way to obtain direction concerning it. Nothing less would satisfy him than a sign from heaven; and it is plain that he was big with expectation. His imagination was warmed with the hope of a sign that should be a mark of the divine approbation. It is not to be wondered at, that a mind thus prepared should be disposed to interpret any incident that should happen, in favour of its own prepossessions, and as countenancing the purpose he had entertained in his own breast. Taking it in this view, nothing happened, but what may reasonably enough be accounted for, without supposing any thing supernatural in the case. He doth not mention any articulate voice, or words spoken to him as from heaven, directing him what to do, or signifying an approbation of his design: he only maketh mention of a noise that seemed to him to come from heaven. He giveth no particular account what kind of noise it was, but only that

that it was *loud and yet gentle*, and that *it came from heaven, for it was like nothing on earth*; that it was in a *serene sky*, and that, *to his thinking, he saw the place from whence it came*. In this situation of his mind, any noise that happened at that precise juncture, and which had something unusual in it (and it is easy to suppose several things of this kind), might be apt to make an impression on his imagination. I shall only put one supposition, and it is this; that at that time it might happen to thunder at a distance, which might well be in summer-time, though in that part of the sky which was within his view there was no cloud to be seen, and all seemed perfectly serene; and the “noise of thunder heard remote” (to use Milton’s phrase) coming at that instant when the soul was filled with expectation of something extraordinary, would undoubtedly greatly affect him, and might be regarded as a sign of approbation from heaven, which was what he sought for: and then no wonder that it comforted and cheered him, as his Lordship observes it did.

It is, I must confess, a great satisfaction to me to reflect, that the evidence of the Christian religion doth not depend upon such equivocal signs as this. The attestations given to the first preachers and publishers of the gospel were of such a kind, that, supposing them to have really happened, they could not reasonably, or with the least appearance of probability, be ascribed to any thing but a divine interposition; and therefore might justly be regarded as marks of the divine approbation of the Christian scheme.

Upon this occasion, I cannot help drawing some kind of parallel in my own mind, between this incident that happened to this noble Lord, and that extraordinary appearance from heaven which St. Paul gives an account of; and which, with what followed upon it, had such an effect upon him, as to conquer his obstinate prejudices, and to engage him to profess and preach that faith in Christ which he himself had zealously persecuted before. I believe the warmest advocates for Christianity would be ready to own, that if that great apostle had had no better account to give of the reasons and motives of his conversion, than such a sign from heaven as Lord Herbert mentions, this would have been a very slender foundation either for himself or others to go upon, in receiving the Christian doctrine as of divine original. But the slightest

slightest comparison of the cases may let us see that there is a wide and amazing difference between them. Lord Herbert's mind was prepossessed with the expectation of a sign from heaven: he sought it, he applied to God for it, he had an hope that something of this kind would happen: and when the thing came which he took for a sign, it was in favour of what he no doubt strongly wished and desired before: yet, prepossessed as his imagination was, he heard no voice of words, nor articulate language, signifying to him the divine will. But St. Paul was the farthest in the world from desiring or expecting a sign from heaven in favour of the religion of Jesus: on the contrary, his mind was at that very instant wholly possessed with the strongest prejudices against it. He was then going to Damascus, with a commission from the high-priest to seize the disciples of Jesus, and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished; and he was persuaded in his own conscience that he was right in doing so. He *breathed out threatnings and slaughter* against them, as the sacred writer expresseth it: and he himself tells us, that *he verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*. In this circumstance of things, if we should suppose him seized with a sudden pang of enthusiasm, though this is by no means likely to have happened to him, as he was travelling along the road at noon-day, with several others in his company; but if we should suppose that something of this kind happened to him, and that he saw an extraordinary light from heaven, which he took to be a sign that heaven approved the work in which he was then engaged; or if he had thought he also heard a voice from above speaking to him, and animating him to go on, and courageously to execute the commission he had received from the high-priest, and promising him success in it; there might possibly be some pretence for ascribing it to the working of an over-heated imagination, filled with the design he was upon, which engaged all his thoughts and resolutions. But it is plain that, in the temper he was then in, he could not have the least expectation of Jesus of Nazareth's appearing to him with a celestial splendour and glory, calling to him with a majestic voice from heaven, and, in words which he distinctly heard, reproving him for his enmity to him, and persecuting rage against his disciples, appointing him his minister and apostle, and commissioning

ing him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and to invite them to a participation of the benefits and privileges of his kingdom; which were things the most remote from his apprehension that could possibly be conceived.

I need not here particularly repeat all the circumstances of a story so well known as that of the divine appearance which occasioned St. Paul's conversion: but taking in the whole, as he himself relateth it, it is absolutely impossible that it should have been the effect of his own enthusiastic imagination, considering how his mind was at that time disposed: To which may be added the consequent effects which shewed the reality of it. Struck blind with the glory of the appearance, he was obliged to be led to Damascus; and it was only by the laying on of Ananias' hands in the name of Jesus, that he had his sight restored. There was immediately a wonderful change in his dispositions, notions, and inclinations. He became enlightened at once, without human instruction, in a perfect knowledge of the religion of Jesus, than which nothing could be more contrary in many points to the pharisaical principles and prejudices he had so deeply imbibed. He was endued with the most extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and had a power of communicating those gifts to others, by the laying on of his hands in the name of a crucified and risen Jesus; and in the same sacred name was enabled to perform the most illustrious miracles. These were matters of fact in which he could not be deceived himself, and of which there were numbers of witnesses: and accordingly he went through the nations preaching Jesus Christ, and him crucified, as the Saviour and Lord; which he did with such evidence, and had such extraordinary attestations from heaven accompanying him, that vast numbers were brought over by his ministry to embrace a religion which was absolutely contrary to their most rooted prejudices, inclinations, and interests.

There might possibly be some suspicions with regard to the relation of a fact so circumstanced as was that of Lord Herbert. It might be thought possible, that an author might feign an approbation from heaven in favour of some peculiar notions he had entertained, and of a book of which he was very fond, and upon which he seems to have valued himself: not that I think there is any reasonable ground of suspicion, that this noble writer feigned what

is it had in his mind

what he relates concerning this incident; but yet some may suppose, that an author might possibly be under some temptation to deviate from the rules of truth in such a case. But no such suspicion can be entertained in St. Paul's case, that he should have feigned a heavenly appearance in favour of a religion which he was well known to have hated, persecuted, and despised, and which was absolutely contrary to the prejudices to which he had been so obstinately addicted, and to all his worldly expectations, connections, and interests: to which it may be added, that he gave the highest possible proof of his own sincere belief of the fact as he has related it, by his inviolable adherence to that religion to which he was by this extraordinary means converted; that he exposed himself by it to the different persecutions, and to the greatest and most various labours and sufferings that any one man ever endured; and which he bore with an invincible constancy, and even with a divine exultation and joy, supported by the testimony of a good conscience, and the hope of a glorious reward in the heavenly world.

Upon the whole, let us put the supposition, that Lord Herbert, in the account he hath given of what happened to him, has had the strictest regard to truth (which, for my part, I have no doubt of), and that the account St. Paul hath given of the extraordinary appearance to him from heaven is also true, there is this vast difference between the cases: that, granting all that happened to Lord Herbert to have been as he relates it, there is nothing in it but what may be accounted for in some such manner as that mentioned above, without supposing any thing supernatural in the case; but, granting the truth of the relation which St. Paul gives of the divine appearance to him, with the effects that followed upon it, there is no possibility of accounting for it in a natural way, or indeed in any other manner than by owning an extraordinary and supernatural interposition. Though therefore the former, granting it to be true, can by no means be depended upon as a certain mark of the approbation of heaven given to Lord Herbert's book; yet the latter, supposing it in like manner true, affordeth a convincing proof of an extraordinary attestation given from heaven to the divine mission and glory of a crucified Jesus, and to the truth and divine original of the Christian revelation.

I may perhaps be thought to have expatiated too much in my

reflections on this occasion; but I hope I shall be excused when it is considered, that the incident is of so uncommon a nature; that it relateth to a person of Lord Herbert's character and eminence; and that the account of it is extracted from memorials written by himself.

I shall make no farther remarks on the anonymous letter, than to observe, that the writer of it makes mention of the answers to Lord Herbert, published by Mr. Baxter and Mr. Halyburton. He also takes notice of the Weekly Miscellany, as having lately appeared against him. The two former I have taken notice of above; the latter I have not seen, and therefore know not how far some of the observations there made may have coincided with mine.

L E T T E R III.

*Observations on Mr. Hobbes's Writings—He sometimes professeth a Regard to the Scripture as the Word and Law of God; at other times ridicules Inspiration or Revelation—He attempts to invalidate the sacred Canon, and makes Religion and the Authority of Scripture to depend entirely on the Authority of the Magistrate—His strange Maxims in Morality and Politics—His Scheme tends to subvert Natural Religion as well as Revealed—Confuted by several learned Authors.*

SIR,

**I**N my two former letters some observations were made on the writings of that eminent deist, Lord Herbert of Chisbury. The next writer I shall mention was in several respects of a different character from that noble Lord, though also very famous in his time, the noted Mr Thomas Hobbes of Malmshury. There have been few persons whose writings have had a more pernicious influence in spreading irreligion and infidelity than his; yet as none of his treatises are directly levelled against revealed religion, I shall content myself with some brief general reflections upon them. He sometimes affects to speak with veneration of the sacred writings. He expressly declareth, that though the laws of nature are not laws as they proceed from nature, yet, “ as they are given by God in holy scripture, they are properly called laws; for the holy scripture is the voice of God, ruling all things by the greatest right\*.” But though he seems here to make the laws of scripture to be the laws of God, and to derive their force from his supreme authority, yet in many other passages, some of which I shall have occasion to mention, he supposeth them to have no authority but what they derive from the prince or civil power. He sometimes seems to acknowledge inspiration to be a supernatural gift, and the immediate hand of God; at other times he treats the pretence to it as a sign of madness; and, by a jingle upon the words, represents God's speaking

\* De Cive, cap. iii. sect. 33.



to the ancient prophets in a dream or vision, to be no more than their dreaming that he spoke to them, or *dreaming between sleeping and waking* \*. To weaken the authority of the sacred Canon, he endeavours to shew, that the books of Moses, and the historical writings of the Old Testament, were not written by those whose names they bear, and that they are derived to us from no other authority but that of Esdras, who restored them when they were lost †: a supposition in which he hath been since followed by others on the same side, and very lately by a noble Lord; though the absurdity of it is manifest, and hath been fully exposed ‡. As to the writings of the New Testament, he acknowledgeth, that they are as ancient as the times of the apostles, and that they were written by persons who lived in those times, some of whom saw the things which they relate; which is what many of our modern deists seem unwilling to own. And though he insinuates that the copies of the scriptures were but few, and only in the hands of the Ecclesiastics, yet he adds, that he sees no reason to doubt, but that the books of the New Testament, as we have them, are the true registers of those things which were done and said by the prophets and apostles §. But then he most absurdly pretends, that they were not received as of divine authority in the Christian church, till they were declared to be so by the council of Laodicea, in the year after Christ 364: though nothing is capable of a clearer proof, than that their authority was acknowledged among Christians from the apostolic times.

He expressly asserts, that we have no assurance of the certainty of scripture, but the *authority of the church*, and this he resolveth into the *authority of the commonwealth*: and declares, that till the sovereign ruler had prescribed them, “the precepts of scripture were not obligatory laws, but only counsel and advice, which he that was counselled might without injustice refuse to observe, and being contrary to the laws could not without injustice observe;” that the word of the interpreter of scripture is the word of God, and the sovereign magistrate is the interpreter of scripture, and of all doctrines, to whose authority we must

\* Leviath. p. 196.

† Ibid. p. 200, 201, 203.

‡ Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters, p. 51, &c.

§ Leviath. p. 204.

stand\*. Yea, he carrieth it so far as to pronounce, that Christians are bound in conscience to obey the laws of an infidel king in matters of religion; that "thought is free; but when it comes to confession of faith, the private reason must submit to the public, that is to say, to God's lieutenant." And accordingly, he alloweth the subject, being commanded by the sovereign, to deny Christ in words, holding firmly in his heart the faith of Christ: and that in that case, "it is not he that denieth Christ before men, but his governor and the laws of his country †." And he expressly declareth, that idolatry to which a man is compelled by the terror of death is not idolatry. And this being the case, it is not to be wondered at, that he speaks with contempt of the ancient martyrs. In this the succeeding deists have not failed to imitate him. They have reproached those excellent persons as having *died as a fool dieth ‡*; as if it were a ridiculous and senseless thing to endure hardships and sufferings, for the sake of truth and conscience: and yet those have been always justly admired, who have exposed themselves to the greatest dangers in a noble cause, and who would not do a base thing to save their lives.

Mr. Hobbes acknowledgeth the existence of God, and that we must of necessity arise from the effects which we behold, to the eternal Power of all powers, and Cause of all causes; and he blames those as absurd who call the world, or the soul of the world, God: but he denies that we know any more of him than that he exists, and seems plainly to make him corporeal; for he affirms, that that which is not body is nothing at all §: and though he sometimes seems to acknowledge religion and its obligations, and that there is an honour and worship due to God, prayer, thanksgivings, oblations, &c. yet he advanceth principles which evidently tend to subvert all religion. The account he gives of it is this, "that from the fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed, ariseth religion, not allowed superstition." And he elsewhere resolveth religion into things which he himself derides; *viz.* "opinions of

\* See *Quest. concerning Liberty*, p. 136. *De Cive*, c. 17. *Leviath.* p. 169. 283, 284.

† *Ibid.* p. 238. 271.

‡ See *Christ. not founded on Argument*, p. 32, 33.

§ *Leviath.* p. 214. 271.

“ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion to what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics\*.” He takes pains in many of his works to prove man to be a necessary agent, and expressly asserts the materiality and mortality of the human soul; and he represents the doctrine concerning the distinction between soul and body in man to be an error contracted by the contagion of the demonology of the Greeks. We may observe by the way the great difference there is in this respect between Mr. Hobbes and Lord Herbert. This noble writer has reckoned the notion and belief of a future state among the common notions naturally obvious to the minds of all men: but the account Mr. Hobbes is pleased to give of it is this, that the belief of a future state after death “is a belief grounded upon other men’s saying, that they “knew it supernaturally, or that they knew those, that knew “them, that knew others, that knew it supernaturally †.”

That we may have the better notion of this extraordinary writer, it may not be amiss to mention some other of his maxims. He asserts, that by the law of nature every man hath a right to all things, and over all persons, and that the natural condition of man is a state of war, a war of all men against all men: that there is no way so reasonable for any man as to anticipate, that is, by force and wiles to master all the persons of others that he can, so long till he sees no other power great enough to endanger him: that the civil laws are the only rules of good and evil, just and unjust, honest and dishonest; and that antecedently to such laws every action is in its own nature indifferent: that there is nothing good or evil in itself, nor any common laws constituting what is naturally just and unjust; that all things are measured by what every man judgeth fit, where there is no civil government, and by the laws of society where there is one ‡. That the power of the sovereign is absolute, and that he is not bound by any compacts with his subjects: that nothing the sovereign can do to the subject can properly be called injurious or wrong; and that the king’s word is sufficient to take any thing from any subject, if there be need, and the king is judge of that need §.

\* Leviath. p. 54.

† Ibid. p. 74.

‡ De Cive, c. vi. f. 18. c. x. f. 1. c. 12. f. i. Leviath. p. 24, 25. 60, 61, 62, 63. 72.

§ Leviath. p. 90. 106.

In Mr. Hobbes we have a remarkable instance what strange extravagancies men of wit and genius may fall into, who, whilst they value themselves upon their superior penetration, and laugh at popular errors and superstition, often give into notions so wild and ridiculous, as none of the people that govern themselves by plain common sense could be guilty of. It will hardly be thought too severe a censure to say, that Mr. Hobbes's scheme strikes at the foundation of all religion, both natural and revealed: that it tendeth not only to subvert the authority of the scripture, but to destroy God's moral administration: that it confoundeth the natural differences of good and evil, virtue and vice, and taketh away the distinction between soul and body, and the liberty of human actions: that it destroyeth the best principles of the human nature, and, instead of that innate benevolence and social disposition which should unite men together, supposeth all men to be naturally in a state of war with one another: that it erecteth an absolute tyranny in the state and church, which it confounds, and maketh the will of the prince or governing power the sole standard of right and wrong; and that it destroyeth all the rights of private conscience, and indeed leaveth no room for conscience at all.

But notwithstanding the ill tendency of many of Mr. Hobbes's principles, yet the agreeableness of his stile, of which he was a great master, joined to his dogmatical way of pronouncing with a very decisive air, and the very oddness and apparent novelty of his notions, gave them a great run for a time, and did no small mischief. He himself boasteth of the good reception his *Leviathan* met with among many of our gentry: but the manifold absurdities and inconsistencies of his scheme, and the pernicious consequences of it to religion, morality, and the civil government, have been so well exposed, and set in so clear a light, that there are not many of our modern deists that would be thought openly to espouse his system in its full extent: though indeed it cannot be denied, that there are not a few things in their writings borrowed from his, and that some of them have chosen rather to follow him than Lord Herbert in several of his principles, and particularly in asserting the materiality and mortality of the human soul, and denying man's free agency.

Mr. Hobbes met with many learned adversaries, among whom

we may particularly reckon Dr. Seth Ward, afterwards bishop of Salisbury, and archbishop Bramhal. The latter argued with great acuteness against that part of his scheme which relates to liberty and necessity, and afterwards attacked the whole of his system, in a piece called the *Catching of the Leviathan*, published at London in 1658; in which he undertakes to demonstrate, out of Mr. Hobbes's own works, that no man who is thoroughly an *Hobbiſt* can be "a good Christian, or a good commonwealth's man, or reconcile himself to himself." The reverend Mr. Tenison, afterwards archbishop of Canterbury, gave a summary view of Mr. Hobbes's principles, with a judicious confutation of them, in a book called *The Creed of Mr. Hobbes examined*, published in 1670. To these may be added, the famous Earl of Clarendon, who wrote *A brief View and Survey of the dangerous and pernicious Errors to the Church and State in Mr. Hobbes's Book, entitled "Leviathan."* This was published in 1676. Bishop Parker, Mr. Tyrrel, but, above all, Bishop Cumberland, in his justly celebrated work *de Legibus Naturæ*, did also distinguish themselves in this controversy. It is to be observed, that the learned writers who opposed Mr. Hobbes did not so much apply themselves to vindicate revealed religion, or the Christian system, as to establish the great principles of all religion and morality, which his scheme tended to subvert: and to shew, that they had a real foundation in reason and nature. In this they certainly did good service to religion: yet some of the enemies of revelation endeavoured to take advantage of it, as if this shewed that there is no other religion but the law of nature, and that any extraordinary revelation is needless and useless. Thus, on every supposition, these gentlemen seem resolved to carry their cause against Christianity. If there be no law of nature, no real difference, in the nature of things, between moral good and evil, virtue and vice, there is no such thing as religion at all, and consequently no Christian religion. On the other hand, if it be proved that there is such a thing as the religion and law of nature, which is founded in the very nature and relations of things, and agreeable to right reason, then it is concluded, that this alone is sufficient, and that it is clear and obvious to all mankind, and therefore they need no revelation to instruct them in it, or assure them of it. A very wrong conclusion this! since it is manifest  
that

that a well-attested revelation from God would be of very great use, both farther to clear and confirm some of the important principles of natural religion, which, though in themselves reasonable, were in fact greatly obscured and perverted in the corrupt state of mankind; and also to instruct men in things which, however highly useful to be known, they could not have clearly discovered or been fully assured of, by the mere unassisted light of nature, without a divine revelation.

This might lead one into a train of reflections on the connection there is between natural and revealed religion: but I must content myself with giving short hints of things: to enlarge farther upon them would not suit my present design. You will probably hear from me again soon; and in the mean time, I am, &c.

## L E T T E R   I V .

*Mr. Charles Blount's Notes on the Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, designed to expose Christianity—His Religio Laici copied, for the most Part, from Lord Herbert—He had a chief Hand in the Oracles of Reason—He attacks the Doctrine of a Mediator, as unworthy of God—His remarkable Concession, that it is not safe to trust to Deism alone, without Christianity joined with it.—Mr. Toland, another deistical Writer; very fond of asserting Paradoxes—The Design of his Amyntor to render the Canon of the New Testament uncertain—He gives a large Catalogue of spurious Gospels, and attempts to shew that they were equally received and acknowledged in the primitive Times, with the Gospels which are now looked upon as authentic—The contrary fully proved in the Answers that were made to him.*

SIR,

**A**MONG those who openly avowed the cause of deism, and seemed zealous to promote it, may be reckoned Charles Blount, Esq. In 1680 he published a translation of the two first books of Philostratus's Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, with large notes, which are manifestly intended to strike at revealed religion. Apollonius, you know, was a Pythagorean philosopher that lived in the first century, whose character and miracles were opposed by the pagans to those of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hierocles wrote a book to this purpose, which was answered by Eusebius, who hath plainly proved, that Philostratus was a vain and fabulous writer, and that his accounts are full of romantic stories and ridiculous fables: and whoever impartially considers Philostratus's book, which is still extant, must be convinced that Eusebius's censure upon it is just. Nothing can be supposed more different than Philostratus's manner of writing, stuffed with rhetorical flourishes and vain ostentations of learning, is from the plain, sober, artless narration of the evangelists, which hath all the characters of genuine unaffected simplicity, and a sincere regard to truth: To which it may be added, that Apollonius's philosophy, and the wonders he is said to have wrought, all tended to uphold the reigning

reigning established superstition and idolatry, which at the same time had all worldly advantages on its side, and yet was not able to oppose the progress of Christianity, which triumphed over it, though destitute of all those advantages, and though it had all the powers of the world against it:—a manifest proof this, how vastly superior the evidence of our Saviour's divine character and miracles was to any thing that could be produced in opposition to it! And yet many of our modern deists have been fond of running the parallel between Apollonius and Jesus Christ. Mr. Blount, in his notes, has thrown out several insinuations against the miracles of our Saviour, in which he has been followed and even exceeded by some succeeding writers, of whom I may afterwards give some account. This gentleman has on several occasions discovered a strong prejudice against the scriptures, and shewn how willing he is to lay hold on whatsoever he thinks may expose them: it could be only owing to this, that he finds fault with that manner of expression, *he opened his mouth, and said*\*; a censure which may be thought to proceed from an extraordinary nicety, rather than a true justness of taste. But though this, and other oriental idioms and forms of speech, may differ from what is usual among us, the language of scripture has been always admired by the best judges.

In 1683 the same gentleman published a small book intitled *Religio Laici*, which is little more than a translation of Lord Herbert's treatise of the same name. The additions and improvements he has made, are so few, and of such small moment, as not to deserve a distinct consideration, and therefore I shall refer to the reflections already made on Lord Herbert's scheme.

Some years after, in 1693, there was another book published, in which Mr. Blount had a principal concern, and which was plainly intended to propagate infidelity. It had a pompous title, *The Oracles of Reason*, and was published after Mr. Blount's unhappy end, by his friend Mr. Charles Gildon, who ushered it into the world by a preface in defence of self-murder, which that gentleman had been guilty of, to get rid of the uneasiness of a passion which proved too violent for him. The title of the book seemed to promise demonstration, as if it were intended to serve

\* Blount's Notes on Philostratus, p. 69.



as an infallible guide in matters of religion: but there is little order or method in it, or regularity of design. It is a collection of different pieces, consisting for the most part of letters between Mr. Blount and his friends, intermixed with fragments and translations from some Greek and Latin authors, done with no great exactness.

That part of the book which relates to natural religion and its sufficiency, proceeds chiefly upon Lord Herbert's plan. There are two of the tracts particularly remarkable this way: the one is *A Summary Account of the Deist's Religion*, by Mr. Blount: the other is a letter from A. W. to Mr. Blount, concerning natural religion, as opposed to divine revelation. In the former of these, Mr. Blount, having set himself to shew that God is not to be worshipped by an image or by sacrifices, next endeavoureth to prove that he is not to be worshipped by a mediator. He pretends that the worship of God by a mediator derogateth from his infinite mercy, equally as an image doth from his spirituality and infinity.

But his argument is founded upon a misapprehension or misrepresentation of the gospel scheme. Far from derogating from the mercy or goodness of God, the appointment of such a mediator as the gospel proposeth is one of the most signal instances of his grace and goodness towards mankind: It is a wise and gracious provision for exercising his mercy towards guilty creatures, in such a way as is most becoming his own glorious government and perfections, and most conducive to their peace and comfort, and most proper to remove their guilty jealousies and fears.

But he farther urgeth, that if God appointed the mediator, this shews that he was really reconciled to the world before, and consequently that there was no need of a mediator. It sheweth indeed that God had kind thoughts of mercy, and gracious intentions towards the human race; but this doth not prove that therefore the appointment of a mediator was needless. On the contrary, his wisdom determined him to take this method as the properest way of exercising his mercy, and dispensing the effects of his goodness; of which he is certainly the fittest judge: And whosoever duly considers the sublime idea given us in the gospel of the mediator, the work upon which he was sent, and the offices he was invested with, may observe such characters of the divine wisdom and goodness in it, such a regard to the honour of  
 God,

God, and to the comfort and benefit and happiness of mankind, as ought greatly to recommend the gospel scheme. But the distinct consideration of these things would take up more room than the present design will allow.

To this tract is prefixed a letter from Mr. Blount to Dr. Sydenham, in which there is this remarkable passage: that “undoubtedly, in our travels to the other world, the common road is the safest; and though deism is a good manuring of a man’s conscience, yet certainly, if sowed with Christianity, it will produce the most plentiful crop.” Here he seems plainly to own, that it is not safe to trust to deism alone, if Christianity be not joined with it\*.

As to the other tract I mentioned, the letter written by A. W. to Mr. Blount, concerning natural religion as opposed to divine revelation, the chief heads of natural religion are there reduced to seven articles. 1. That there is an infinite and eternal God, creator of all things. 2. That he governs the world by his providence. 3. That it is our duty to worship and obey him as our creator and governor. 4. That our worship consists in prayer to him, and praise of him. 5. That our obedience consists in the rules of right reason, the practice of which is moral virtue. 6. That we are to expect rewards and punishments hereafter according to our actions in this life, which includes the soul’s immortality, and is proved by our admitting providence. 7. That when we err from the rules of our duty, we ought to repent, and trust in God’s mercy for pardon†. Here Lord Herbert’s five articles, which were all that he accounted necessary, are enlarged to seven, which indeed may be regarded as farther explications of the former: and with other explications they might be enlarged to a still greater number. What was observed concerning Lord Herbert’s articles may be applied to these. It will be acknowledged, that they are agreeable to right reason; but this is no proof that therefore an express divine revelation would not be needful, in the present state of mankind, to set them in a stronger light, and give them additional force. Several of the deists would be far from agreeing with this writer in some of the articles he mentions. The first article runs thus, that *there is*

\* Oracles of Reason, p. 87. 91.

† Ibid. p. 197.

one eternal self-existent God, creator of all things; where it is plainly supposed, that the world was created; and yet in another part of that book, Mr. Blount has taken the pains to translate a large fragment of Ocellus Lucanus, which is designed to prove the eternity of the world\*: and it appears that he himself does not disapprove it. In another part of these pretended *Oracles*, in a letter from Mr. Gildon to Mr. Blount, the opinion of the origin of good and evil, from two different eternal principles, the one good, the other evil, is represented as not unreasonable †. In another of the above-mentioned seven articles it is declared, that the *worship we owe to God consists in prayer to Him, and praise of Him*: and yet it is well known, that this has been contested and denied by some of the ancient philosophers and modern deists; and Mr. Blount himself, in his notes upon the Life of Apollonius Tyanæus, having observed that some of the heathens used no prayers at all, insinuates, in their names, objections against that duty ‡. With regard to the fifth article, that *our obedience consists in the rules of right reason, the practice whereof is moral virtue*, this is easily said in general; but there is no great likelihood, that, if they were to come to a particular explication, they would agree what is to be looked upon as included in the rules of right reason, and in the practice of moral virtue. Some of them would probably think it reasonable to indulge the appetites and passions in instances which others would not think reasonable or proper: even in a point of such consequence as self-murder, some of the ancient philosophers and modern deists have pleaded for it, whilst others have condemned it; and it is openly justified (as was before observed) in the preface to these *Oracles of Reason*. One should therefore think no reasonable man could deny, that express precepts, determining by a divine authority the particulars of moral duty, would be of great advantage. As to the article of future rewards and punishments, and the soul's immortality, this is represented by Mr. Blount, in a letter to the right honourable the most ingenious Strephon, and by A. W. in his letter to Mr. Blount, as a necessary part of natural religion; and yet he observes, that the ancient heathens dif-

\* *Oracles of Reason*, p. 212—228.

† *Ibid.* p. 194.

‡ *Notes on Philostratus*, p. 38.

agreed about it\*. In another part of these *Oracles*, it is declared to be probable, that the soul of man is not of an entirely distinct nature from the body, but only a purer material composition †. Now the soul's materiality is not very consistent with the doctrine of its immortality: and from this we may judge of A. W.'s argument against Christianity, that "if the reasons of the Christian religion were evident, there would be no longer any contention or difference about it: and if all do not agree in it, those marks of truth in it are not visible, which are necessary to draw our assent ‡." This argument, if it were good for any thing, would prove that there are no visible marks of truth in natural religion, no more than in revealed; since it cannot be denied that men differ about the one as well as the other: but the truth is, the argument doth not conclude in either case.

There are several things in the *Oracles of Reason* which are particularly designed against the holy scriptures, and which have been repeated by others since: but the sacred writings have been fully vindicated against those exceptions. Mr. Blount has particularly attacked the writings of Moses, and the most considerable part of what he has offered to this purpose is borrowed either from the learned author of the *Archæologia-Philosophica*, who, though he differed in some things from what is generally looked upon as the true interpretation of Moses's sense, was far from intending to subvert the authority of the Mosaic writings; or from the author of the hypothesis of the *Pre-Adamites*, who afterwards retracted his own book. From this writer Mr. Blount hath given us a literal translation for several pages together, in different parts of this book, without making the least acknowledgment of it, or taking any notice of the answers that had been returned. In like manner he hath thought proper to repeat the objections which have been frequently urged against the Mosaic writings, from the irreconcilableness of the accounts there given with the antiquities pretended to by the most learned heathen nations, particularly the Chaldeans and Egyptians. Our great *Stillingsfleet* had, in the first book of his *Origines Sacrae*, very amply considered that matter, and clearly shewn the vanity of those pretences; yet they are here again advanced with as much

\* *Oracles of Reason*, p. 201. † *Ibid.* p. 154. 187. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 201. 206.

confidence as if they had never been refuted. The same observation may be made with regard to the arguments of Ocellus Lucanus about the eternity of the world, which are translated and produced with great pomp by Mr. Blount, though they had been unanswerably exposed in the last-mentioned learned treatise\*.

The *Oracles of Reason* were animadverted upon by Mr. John Bradley, in a book published at London in 1699, in 12mo. intitled, *An Impartial View of the Truth of Christianity, with the History of the Life and Miracles of Apollonius Tyanæus: To which are added, some Reflections on a Book called "Oracles of Reason."* This book I have not seen. Dr. Nichols's *Conference with a Theist* was also particularly designed by the learned and ingenious author in opposition to the *Oracles of Reason*; and he hath not left any material part of that book unanswered. The first part of this *Conference* was published at London in 12mo. in 1696, and the other three parts in the following years. But what deserveth our special notice, Mr. Gildon, the publisher of the *Oracles of Reason*, and who had recommended them to the world with a pompous eulogium, was afterwards, upon mature consideration, convinced of his error; of which he gave a remarkable proof, in a good book which he published some years after, in 1705, intitled *The Deist's Manual*. It is observable, that the greatest part of this book is taken up in vindicating the doctrines of the existence and attributes of God, his providence and government of the world, the immortality of the soul, and a future state: and his reason for it was, as he himself intimates, because many of the deists, with whom he was well acquainted, did really deny those great principles which lie at the foundation of all religion, or at least represented them as doubtful and uncertain; and their not admitting natural religion in its just extent formed some of their principal prejudices against the christian revelation.

The next writer of whom I shall give some account is Mr. Toland, who, though he called himself a christian, made it very much the business of his life to serve the cause of infidelity, and to unsettle men's minds with regard to religion. There are many things in his writings which shew, that he was very fond of asserting things that had an appearance of novelty, however destitute

\* Origines Sacre, book iii. c. 2. f. 4, 5, 6, 7.

of reason or probability; a remarkable instance of which he has given, in his strange attempt to prove that motion is essential to matter. See his letters to *Serena*, Letter III. \*. In another book, which he calls *Pantheisticon*, published in 1720, he has shewn himself a favourer and admirer of the *Pantheistic* philosophy, i. e. that of *Spinoza*, which acknowledgeth no other God but the universe. The first thing that made Mr. Toland taken notice of, was his *Christianity not mysterious; or, a Discourse shewing, that there is Nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it, and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly called a mystery*. This was published in 1696, and was animadverted upon by several writers of learning and reputation, as Mr. Beccosfal, Mr. Beverly, Mr. John Norris, Dr. Payne, Mr. Syngé, afterwards archbishop of Tuam, and Mr. Brown, afterwards bishop of Cork. In 1709 he published at the Hague two Latin dissertations. The first is intitled, *Adeisdæmon, sive Titus Livius a superstitione vindicatus. In qua dissertatione probatur Livium historicum in sacris, prodigiis, et ostentis enarrandis, haudquam fuisse credulum aut superstitiosum: ipsamque superstitionem non minus Reipublicæ (si non magis) exitiosam esse, quam purum putum atheismum*. The second dissertation bears the title of *Origines Judaicæ, sive Strabonis de Mose et religione Judaica historia breviter illustrata*. In this dissertation he seems to prefer the account of this pagan author concerning Moses and the Jewish religion, before that which is given by the Jews themselves. These two dissertations were answered by Mr. la Faye, minister at Utrecht, in a book printed in 1709, and intitled, *Defensio religionis, nec non Mosis et gentis Judaicæ, contra duas dissertationes Joannis Tolandi*; and by Mr. Benoit, minister at Delft, in his *Mélange de remarques critiques, historiques, philosophiques, théologiques, sur les deux dissertations de Mr. Toland, intitulées, l'un l'Homme sans superstition, et l'autre les origines Judaïques*, printed at Delft in 1712. But what I shall here particularly take notice of, and by which he hath chiefly distinguished himself, is the pains he hath taken to invalidate the authority of the sacred Canon of the New Testament, and to render it uncertain and precarious. This seems to have been the design of

\* This is confuted in Dr. Clarke's Demonstration, &c. p. 24. Edit. 7th.

the book he calls *Amyntor*, which he published in 1698, and in which he hath given a catalogue of books, attributed in the primitive times to Jesus Christ, his apostles, and other eminent persons, "together with remarks and observations relating to the Canon of Scripture." He hath there raked together whatever he could find relating to the spurious gospels, and pretended sacred books, which appeared in the early ages of the Christian church. These he hath produced with great pomp, to the number of eighty and upwards; and though they were most of them evidently false and ridiculous, and carried the plainest marks of forgery and imposture, of which, no doubt, he was very sensible, yet he has done what he could to represent them as of equal authority with the four gospels, and other sacred books of the New Testament, now received among Christians. To this end he has taken advantage of the unwary and ill-grounded hypotheses of some learned men, and has endeavoured to prove, that the books of the present Canon lay concealed in the coffers of private persons till the latter times of Trajan or Adrian, and were not known to the clergy or churches of those times, nor distinguished from the spurious works of heretics; and that the scriptures which we now receive as canonical, and others which we now reject, were indifferently and promiscuously cited and appealed to by the most ancient Christian writers. His design in all this manifestly is to shew, that the gospels, and other sacred writings of the New Testament, now acknowledged as canonical, really deserve no greater credit, and are no more to be depended upon, than those books which are rejected and exploded as forgeries: and yet he had the confidence to pretend, in a book he afterwards published, that his intention in his *Amyntor* was not to invalidate, but to illustrate and confirm, the Canon of the New Testament\*. This may serve as one instance, among the many that might be produced, of the writer's sincerity.

\* See Toland's preface to his *Nazarenus*, p. 9. This very odd book was well answered by Mr. (afterwards) Dr. Mangey, in his *Remarks upon Nazarenus*; on which Mr. Toland made some reflections, in a Tract he called *Mangoneutes*. Mr. Paterson also published his *Anti-Nazarenus*, in answer to Mr. Toland's book. And Dr. Thomas Brett took some notice of it, in the Preface to his *Tradition necessary to explain and interpret the Holy Scriptures*.

Several

Several good answers were returned to Toland's *Amyntor*. Mr. (afterwards) Dr. Samuel Clarke published a small tract in 1699, intitled, *Some Reflections on that Part of the Book called "Amyntor," which relates to the Writings of the primitive Fathers, and the Canon of the New Testament*. In this he gave an early specimen of those talents, which he afterwards employed to so great advantage in the defence of Christianity. The same book was afterwards answered by the ingenious Mr. Stephen Nye, in his *Historical Account and Defence of the Canon of the New Testament, in Answer to "Amyntor"*; and by Mr. Richardson, in his *Canon of the New Testament Vindicated*, whose work hath been justly and generally esteemed, as executed with great learning and judgment. To these may be added, Mr. Jones, who hath considered this matter distinctly, and at large, in his *New and full Method of settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament*, which was published at London in 1726, in two volumes 8vo.; to which a third small one was afterwards added, published in 1727, but left unfinished by reason of the author's death.

These learned writers have plainly shewn Mr. Toland's great unfairness and disingenuity in his whole management of the argument: That he has frequently imposed upon his readers by false quotations, or by grossly misrepresenting the authors he cites: That he has been guilty of great blunders and ridiculous mistakes: That several of the writings he produces, as having been written in the apostolic age, were forged so late as the third or fourth century: That by far the greatest part of those writings, of which he hath given so pompous a catalogue, and which he would put upon the world as most ancient and apostolical, are expressly rejected by the authors whom he himself refers to, as spurious and apocryphal, or even as absurd and impious forgeries: That as to those few of them which are not expressly rejected and condemned by the writers who have mentioned them, it doth not appear by any one testimony, that they were ever generally received and acknowledged in the Christian church, or equalled with the books of the sacred Canon: and that even those authors who have been thought to quote some of them with approbation, yet expressly declare, that none but the four gospels were received in the Christian church, as of divine authority:



That though some of the false gospels, that they might the better pass upon the people, were compiled out of the genuine gospels, with such additions, omissions, and interpolations, as might best answer the design of the compilers, this did not hinder their being generally rejected; whereas the four gospels, the same which we now receive, were generally acknowledged from the beginning: That these and other sacred books of the New Testament were, even in the earliest ages, spread into distant countries, and were in the possession of great numbers of persons, and read in the churches as divine: And finally, that several of the genuine writers of the three first centuries have left us catalogues of the sacred books of the New Testament, but in none of these catalogues do any of the apocryphal books appear.

To set this whole matter in a clearer light, Mr. Jones has given us a complete enumeration of all the apocryphal books of the New Testament, and made a critical inquiry into each of these books, with an English version of those of them which are now extant, and a particular proof that none of them were ever admitted into the Canon: and he hath distinctly produced and considered every testimony relating to them that is to be found in any Christian writer or writers of the first four centuries after Christ.

Upon all that hath been written on this subject, it is a just and natural reflection, that as the number of spurious gospels which were rejected by the primitive Christians shews, how scrupulous they were not to admit any books as canonical, but those of whose truth and authenticity they had sufficient proofs; so their admitting, and receiving with so general a consent, the four gospels which are now in our hands, affordeth a strong argument, that they had undoubted evidence of the genuine truth and certainty of the evangelical records, which fully satisfied them who lived nearest those times, and who had the best opportunities of knowing; and that to this it was owing, that these, and no others, were generally received and acknowledged as of divine authority.

On this occasion it is proper to mention Dr. Lardner's excellent work of the *Credibility of the Gospel-History*; in the second part of which, consisting of several volumes, he hath made a full and accurate collection of the passages which are to be found in the writers of the first ages of the Christian church, relating to  
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he four gospels, and other sacred books of the New Testament. This he hath executed with so much fidelity and diligence, and with such exactness of judgment, that the English reader, who hath not opportunity to consult the originals, will be able to judge for himself, upon considering the passages of the original authors, which are very faithfully translated. This affordeth so clear and continued a proof of their having been generally received in the earliest ages of the Christian church, that one would hope it should put an end to this part of the controversy.

## L E T T E R V.

*The Earl of Shaftesbury, a fine and much admired Writer—Not very consistent in the Account he gives of Christianity—He casteth Reflections on the Doctrine of future Rewards and Punishments, as if it were of Disservice to the Interests of Virtue—The contrary shewn from his own Acknowledgments—His Lordship resolves the Credit of holy Writ wholly into the Authority and Appointment of the State—He frequently takes Occasion to expose the Scriptures, and represents them as uncertain, and not to be depended upon—What he saith concerning Ridicule, as the Test and Criterion of Truth, examined—It is shewn, that a turn to Ridicule is not the properest Disposition for finding out Truth: and that there is great Danger of its being misapplied—His Lordship's own Writings furnish Instances of such a wrong Application—Authors mentioned that have written against him.*

SIR,

**I**T gives me a real concern, that, among the writers who have appeared against revealed religion, I am obliged to take notice of the noble author of the *Characteristics*. Some indeed are not willing to allow, that he is to be reckoned in this number. Passages are produced out of some of his writings, in which he expresseth very favourable sentiments of Christianity. This he doth particularly in a preface, which, and I believe justly, is ascribed to his Lordship as the author, prefixed to a volume of select sermons of Dr. Benjamin Whichcot, published in 1698. In that preface he finds fault with those in this profane age that represent not only the institution of preaching, but even the gospel itself, and our holy religion, to be a fraud. He expresseth his hope, that from some things in these sermons, even they that are prejudiced against Christianity may be induced to like it the better; and that the vein of goodness which appears throughout these discourses will make such as are already Christians prize Christianity the more; and the fairness, ingenuity, and impartiality,

tiality, which they learn from hence, will be a security to them against the contrary temper of those other irreconcilable enemies to our holy faith. In 1716 some of his letters were published at London, under the title of *Several Letters written by a noble Lord to a young Man in the University*, 8vo. In these letters, which were written a few years before the Earl of Shaftesbury's death, in the years 1707, 1708, 1709, there are excellent sentiments and advices, and some which seem to discover a real regard for the Christian religion.

It were greatly to be wished, on many accounts, that his Lordship had always expressed himself in an uniform manner on this subject. No impartial man will deny him the praise of a fine genius. The quality of the writer, his lively and beautiful imagination, the delicacy of taste he hath shown in many instances, and the graces and embellishments of his style, though perhaps sometimes too affected, have procured him many admirers. To which may be added, his refined sentiments on the beauty and excellence of virtue, and that he hath often spoken honourably of a wife and good providence, which ministers and governs the whole in the best manner; and hath strongly asserted, in opposition to Mr. Hobbes, the natural differences between good and evil; and that man was originally formed for society, and the exercise of mutual kindness and benevolence; and not only so, but for religion and piety too\*. These things have very much prejudiced many persons in his favour, and prepared them for receiving, almost implicitly, whatever he hath advanced. And yet it cannot be denied, that there are many things in his books, which seem to be evidently calculated to cast contempt upon Christianity and the holy Scriptures.

It is in the *Characteristics* that we are properly to look for an account of his Lordship's sentiments. They were first published in three volumes 8vo, in 1711; and the last part of his life was employed in revising them, and preparing for a new and most correct edition of them, which accordingly was published immediately after his death. In them he completed the whole of his works which he intended should be made public: and these books are so generally read, and by many so much admired, that

\* *Characteristics*, vol. iii. p. 224.

it is necessary to take notice of those things in them which seem to have a bad aspect on religion, and to be of a dangerous influence and tendency.

Of this kind are the frequent reflections he hath cast on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. This, as I observed in a former letter, is represented by Lord Herbert as a fundamental article of natural religion: and though he carries it too far, in making it an innate principle, in which all mankind are, and have been always agreed; yet it cannot be denied, that there were some notices and traces of it generally spread among the nations, though mixed with much obscurity, and which probably had a great effect in preserving the remains of religion and virtue among the people, though contradicted by several sects of their philosophers. It is the great advantage and glory of Christianity, that it hath cleared and confirmed this important principle, and hath brought life and immortality into an open light. But the author of the *Characteristics* frequently expresseth himself in a manner, which tendeth to raise a prejudice against this great principle of natural and revealed religion, as if it were of little use in morals, yea, and in many cases of a bad tendency. Thus, after having made an elegant representation of the happy state of things in the heathen world, and the liberty and harmony which then prevailed, he proceeds to shew the different state of things among Christians, which he seems chiefly to attribute to the notion and belief of a future state. “A new sort of policy (saith he) which extends itself to another world, and considers the future lives and happiness of men rather than the present, has made us leap beyond the bounds of natural humanity, and, out of a supernatural charity, has taught us the way of plaguing one another most heartily. It has raised an antipathy which no temporal interest could ever do, and intailed upon us a mutual hatred to all eternity. The *saving of souls* is now the heroic passion of exalted spirits\*.” This is not the only place where his Lordship speaks with ridicule of the *saving of souls*, and of those who act for their souls’ sakes, and make a careful provision for hereafter †. And he elsewhere tells us, speaking of the expectation of God’s dispensing rewards and punishments in a fu-

\* *Characteristics*, vol. i. p. 18, 19, edit. 5th.

† *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 302.

ture life, that “an expectation and dependency so miraculous and extraordinary as this is, must naturally take off from other inferior dependencies and encouragements. Where infinite rewards are thus enforced, and the imagination strongly turned towards them, the other common and natural motives to goodness are apt to be neglected, and lose much by difuse. Other interests are hardly so much as computed, whilst the mind is thus transported in the pursuit of a high advantage, and self-interest, so narrowly confined within ourselves. On this account, all other affections to our friends, relations, or mankind, are often slightly regarded, as being worldly, and of little moment in respect of the interest of our souls\*.” To the same purpose he represents it, as if the Christian were so urged to have *his conversation in heaven*, as not to be obliged to *enter into any engagements with this lower world*, or to concern himself either with the businesses of life, or with the offices of *private friendship*, or the service of the public: and that these are to be regarded as *embarrassments to him in working out his own salvation*†. It seems to be a natural inference from all this, that, according to his representation of the matter, it were better for mankind not to believe, or have any regard to a future state at all; for if the belief be weak, he tells us it will be of the worst consequence. “There can (says he) in some respects be nothing more fatal to virtue than the weak and uncertain belief of future rewards and punishments: for the stress being wholly laid on this foundation, if this foundation seem to fail, there is no farther prospect or security to men’s virtue‡.” And, on the other hand, if the belief be strong, and deeply impressed on the mind, it will cause men to neglect the interests and duties of this present life, the duties they owe to their friends, their neighbours, and their country. This is the account his Lordship gives of it; but it is grossly misrepresented: for since that virtue and goodness which is to be rewarded hereafter includes, according to the scripture account of it, the doing good here on earth as far as we have an opportunity, and even a diligence in the business of our several callings, and the exercise of social duties, it is evidently wrong

\* Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 68.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 99, 100.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 69.

to say, that a regard to the recompences of a future state must carry us off from those duties, when, on the contrary, it bindeth us more strongly to the performance of them. Our having our conversation in heaven is not designed to cause us to neglect the duties incumbent upon us here on earth; for these are most expressly enjoined in the gospel-law, as being comprehended in that righteousness which intitleth us to that future glory; but that we should not take up with the inferior things of this present world as our proper ultimate portion and happiness, but raise our views to a nobler state, where we hope to arrive to the true felicity and perfection of our natures. And this certainly is an admirable lesson, highly to the honour of Christianity; since it is a too great affection and esteem for worldly enjoyments that puts men upon wrong pursuits, and is the principal source of the greatest disorders of human life.

Several other passages might be produced, in which his Lordship seems to represent the belief and expectation of a future state as of pernicious influence. Thus he observes, “ that the principle of self-love, which is naturally so prevailing in us, is improved and made stronger every day by the exercise of the passions on a subject of more extended interest;” (by which he refers to the expectation of eternal happiness in a future state) “ and that there may be reason to apprehend, that a temper of this kind will extend itself through all the parts of life. And this has a tendency to create a stricter attention to self-good and private interest, and must insensibly diminish the affection towards public good, or the interest of society, and introduce a certain narrowness of spirit, which is observable in devout persons of almost all religions and persuasions\*.” Here he lays a heavy charge on the hope of future happiness; as if it had a bad tendency, to spread an inordinate criminal selfishness through the whole of human life, to diminish the public-good affections, and introduce a narrowness of spirit. A most unjust charge this! Since it might easily be shewn, that the belief and hope of such an happiness as the gospel sets before us, and which is there represented as a state of perfect goodness and the most extended benevolence, and for which that *charity* which *seeketh*

\* *Characteristics*, vol. ii. p. 58.

*not her own* is one of the best preparatives, has a tendency, if rightly understood, to enlarge the heart, to purify and ennoble the soul, and raise it above the little narrow interests of the fleshly self, and to fill it with the highest idea of God, and his immense goodness.

But his Lordship urges, that “those who talk of the rewards of virtue make it so very mercenary a thing, and have talked so much of its rewards, that one can hardly tell what there is in it after all that is worth rewarding\*.” He observes that the most heroic virtue, private friendship, and zeal for the public†, have little notice taken of them in our holy religion, nor have any reward promised them: though if they be comprehended in the things that are lovely and virtuous and praise-worthy, they are both commanded there, and shall according to the gospel scheme be rewarded; but his Lordship who supposes the contrary, mentions it as an advantage, that no premium or penalty being enforced in these cases, it leaves more room for disinterestedness,

\* Characteristicks, vol. i. p. 97.

† It has been noted by the deistical writers, that zeal for the public, or love to a man’s country, which was so much inculcated by some of the ancient philosophers and moralists, is passed over in the Gospel; and this is mentioned as a defect in the Christian morality. But if the matter be rightly considered, there is no just foundation for this objection. To have recommended as by a divine authority, what the Romans generally understood by love to their country, a strong passion for the glory of it, and which often carried them to do great injustice to those of other nations, would not have been suited to the nature of a revelation, which was designed for the general good of mankind, and to promote universal benevolence. And if our Saviour had exhorted the Jews in the name of God to a zeal for their country and its liberties, this, in the disposition they were then in, could have been looked upon in no other light, than as stirring them up to tumults and insurrections. But of love to our country, as it signifies a true and affectionate concern for the public good, he gave an admirable example; and his example hath the force of a precept, according to the Christian system. This will be evident to any one that impartially considers the affection he shewed to the Jewish nation, from whom he sprung according to the flesh; the amiable concern he expressed for the miseries he foresaw were coming upon them, and the endeavours he used to prevent those evils, by checking the tumultuous spirit which was then working among them, and engaging them to a peaceable subjection to the Roman government. The same observation may be made with regard to the apostles and first publishers of Christianity after our Saviour’s resurrection. If they had in the name of God urged



*ness*, the virtue is a *free choice*, and *the magnanimity is left entire*\*. And does not this insinuate, that if no reward had been promised at all, to any part of our duty, it would have been the better for us, and our virtues would have been the more excellent? In like manner he represents that resignation to God, which depends upon the hope of infinite retributions or rewards, to be a *false resignation*, which *discovers no worth nor virtue*; since it is only a man's resigning his present life and pleasure conditionally, for that which he himself owns to be beyond an equivalent †.

And yet this right honourable author himself acknowledgeth, that if by the hope of reward be understood the hope and desire of virtuous enjoyments, or of the very practice and exercise of virtue in another life, it is far from being derogatory to virtue, but is rather an evidence of our loving it ‡. And nothing is more evident to any one that is acquainted with the holy scriptures, than that though the future happiness is there sometimes metaphorically described under splendid sensible images, which his Lordship is pleased to reflect upon as trifling and childish §,

it upon the Jews and Gentiles, among whom they preached the gospel, to be zealous for their country, and had promised divine rewards to so heroic a virtue, this would undoubtedly have been regarded as an attempt to raise disturbances in the state. It could not, as things were circumstanced, have produced any good effects, and might probably have had very bad ones. But if by zeal for the public be meant a hearty desire and endeavour to promote the public good, and the real welfare of the community, nothing can be better fitted to answer that end than the Christian law. It hath a manifest tendency, wherever it is sincerely believed and embraced, to make good magistrates, and faithful and peaceable subjects, and to render men truly useful to the public, by engaging them to a diligent discharge of the duties of their several stations and relations, and to the practice of universal righteousness. Christianity, which requires us to exert so noble a spirit of disinterested benevolence, as to be ready to lay down our lives for the brethren, 1 John iii. 16. would certainly engage and animate us, if properly called to it, even to lay down our lives for the good of the community. A virtuous regard to the public happiness, and a contributing as far as in us lies to promote it in our several stations, make a part of that excellent and praise-worthy conduct, which it is the great design of the Christian religion to promote, and which, according to the divine promises there given us, shall be crowned with a glorious reward.

\* Characterist. p. 98, 99, 100, 101.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 59.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 55, 56.

§ Ibid. vol. i. p. 282.

yet the idea there given us of it is the noblest, the sublimest, that can be conceived. It is represented as a state of consummate holiness, goodness, and purity, where we shall arrive to the true perfection of our natures; a state into which *nothing shall enter that defileth*; where the spirits of the just shall be *made perfect*, and even their bodies shall be refined to a wonderful degree; where they shall be associated to the glorious general assembly of holy and happy souls, and to the most excellent part of God's creation, with whom they shall cultivate an eternal friendship and harmony; and, which is chiefly to be considered, where they shall be admitted to the immediate vision of the Deity, and shall be transformed, as far as they are capable of it, into the divine likeness. Such is the happiness the gospel setteth before us, and which certainly furnisheth a motive fitted to work upon the worthiest minds. And the being animated by the hope of such a reward hath nothing mean or mercenary in it, but rather is an argument of a great and noble soul.

And even as to the fear of punishment, this also may be of signal use to restrain the exorbitancies of the passions, to check the career of vice, and to awaken men to serious thoughts, and thereby put them in the way of better impressions. His Lordship himself asserteth the usefulness of punishments, as well as rewards, in all well-regulated governments. And with respect to future punishments he acknowledgeth, that "though this servile state of fear be allowed ever so low and base, yet religion being still a discipline and progress of the soul towards perfection, the motive of reward and punishment is primary, and of the highest moment with us, till being capable of more sublime instructions, we are led from this servile state to the generous service of affection and love\*." And he elsewhere expressly declareth, that "the hope of future rewards, and fear of future punishments, how mercenary or servile soever it may be accounted, is yet in many instances a great advantage, security, and support to virtue;" and he offereth several considerations to prove that it is so†. I cannot therefore help thinking that this admired writer has done very wrong in throwing out so many insinuations against the doctrine of future retributions, and against the holy scrip-

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 63. 273.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 60. & seq.

tures and Christian divines for insisting so much upon it, as though it were of ill influence to morals. I am persuaded, that any one who duly considers the state of mankind, and what a mighty influence our hopes and fears have upon us by the very frame of our nature, must be sensible, that if the scripture had only contained fine and elegant discourses on the beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice, instead of proposing the sanctions of eternal rewards and punishments, it would neither have been so becoming the majesty and dignity of the supreme legislator, nor so well fitted to answer the end of a revelation designed for common use. The scripture indeed doth every where suppose, and frequently representeth the excellence of holiness and virtue, and the turpitude and deformity of vice and sin, and the good effects of the one, and bad effects of the other, even in this present state. But it is the great advantage of the Christian revelation, that it carrieth our views beyond this narrow transitory scene to a future eternal state, and deriveth its most important motives from thence, which he himself acknowledgeth to be of infinitely greater force; and, which is very odd, he seemeth to make the very force of those motives an objection against insisting upon them, as if they would render all other motives and considerations uselefs.

The prejudices his Lordship hath conceived against Christianity sufficiently appear from several of those passages that have been mentioned; to which many others might be added. He is pleased indeed more than once to declare himself a very orthodox believer. He hath assured us, in his ironical way, of his *steady orthodoxy*, and *entire submission to the truly Christian and Catholic doctrines of our holy church, as by law established*: and that he faithfully embraces the *holy mysteries of our religion even in the minutest particulars, notwithstanding their amazing depth*\*. For which he gives this reason, that “when the supreme powers  
“have given their sanction to a religious record or pious writ,  
“it becomes immoral and profane in any one to deny or dispute  
“the divine authority of the least line or syllable contained in  
“it †.” To the same purpose he elsewhere declares, that the mysteries of religion are to be *determined* by those to whom the state has *assigned the guardianship and promulgation of the di-*

\* Characteristics, vol. iii. p. 315, 316.

† Ibid. p. 231.

*vine oracles*; and that the *authority and direction of the law is the only security against heterodoxy and error*, and the only warrant for the authority of *our sacred symbols*\*. So that according to him, Christianity has no other foundation than what will serve a false religion as well as the true. And elsewhere, in the person of the sceptic, he talks of our *visible sovereign's answering for us in matters of religion*†. In this his Lordship exactly agrees with Mr. Hobbes: he is indeed far from asserting with that writer, that there is nothing good or evil in its own nature, and that virtue and vice depend wholly on human authority and laws; this he on all occasions strenuously argueth against. But he comes into another part of his scheme, the making the magistrate or supreme civil power the sole judge of religious truth and orthodoxy, and resolving all doctrines and opinions in religion, and the authority of what shall be accounted holy writ, into the appointment of the state; a scheme which absolutely destroyeth the rights of private judgment and conscience, and which evidently condemneth the conduct and judgment of Christ and his apostles, and the primitive Christians at the first plantation of Christianity, and of those excellent men that stood up for the reformation of it since.

But notwithstanding our noble author's pretended veneration and submission to the holy writ *by public authority established*, he hath taken occasion to expose the scripture, as far as in him lay, to ridicule and contempt, of which many instances might be produced. Not to mention the insinuations he has thrown out relating to particular passages both in the Old Testament and the New, he hath endeavoured to expose the spirit of prophecy, and made a ludicrous representation of it, and compared it with the extravagancies of the maddest enthusiasts‡. Miracles he will not allow to be any proofs, though ever so certain§; or that there is any ground to believe their having been done, but the authority of our governors, and of those whom the *state* hath appointed the *guardians of holy writ*||. He speaks with ridicule, as other deistical writers have often done, of what he calls the

\* Characteristics, p. 71. vol. i. p. 360.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 353.

‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 45. vol. iii. p. 67.

§ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 331, 332.

|| Ibid. vol. iii. p. 71, 72, 73.

*specious pretence of moral certainty, and matter of fact* \*, and insinuates, that the facts recorded in the gospels are absolutely uncertain, and that he that relies upon those accounts must be a *sceptical Christian* †. He represents St. Paul as speaking *sceptically*, and as *no way certain or positive as to the revelation made to him*, though the contrary is manifest from the apostle's own most express declarations ‡. The very encomiums he sometimes pretends to bestow upon the scriptures are of such a kind, as tend rather to give a low and mean idea of them. Thus he commends the *poetical parts of scripture*, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and other entire volumes of the sacred collection, as full of *humourous discourses, and jocular wit*; and saith, that the sacred writers “had recourse to humour and diversion, as a proper means to promote religion, and strengthen the established faith.” In like manner he tells us, that our Saviour's discourses were *sharp, witty, and humourous*; and that his miracles were done with a *certain air of festivity*; and so that it is impossible not to be moved in a pleasant manner at their recital; i. e. it is impossible not to laugh at them §. But though he seemeth here to commend his *good humour*, as he calls it, and elsewhere represents Christianity as, *in the main, a witty good-natured religion*, he insinuateth that this may be all an artful pretence to cover deep designs, and schemes laid for worldly ambition and power. Having observed, that the affection and love which procures a true adherence to the *new religious foundation*, must depend either on a *real or counterfeit goodness in the religious founder*, whom he had called before the *divinely-authorized instructor, and spiritual chief*; he adds, that, “whatever ambitious spirit may inspire him, whatever savage zeal or persecuting principle may be in reserve, ready to disclose itself, when authority and power is once obtained, the first scene of doctrine however fails not to present us with the agreeable views of joy, love, meekness, gentleness, and moderation ||.” I believe few that consider how this is introduced, will doubt its being designed as an insinuation against the character of the holy Jesus; an insinuation for which there is not the least foundation in his whole

\* Characteristicks, vol. i. p. 44.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 72.

‡ Ibid. p. 74, 75. § Ibid. vol. iii. p. 118, 122, 123. || Ibid. p. 114, 115-  
conduct,

conduct, or in the scheme of religion he hath taught, and which therefore is as malicious as it is groundless.

Agreeably to this he elsewhere intimates, that the gospel was only a scheme of the clergy for aggrandizing their own power. He represents it as a *natural suspicion* of those who are called sceptical: "that the holy records themselves were no other than "the pure invention and artificial compliment of an interested "party, in behalf of the richest corporation, and most profitable "monopoly, which could be erected in the world\*." But any one that impartially considers the idea of religion set before us in the New Testament, in its primitive simplicity, will be apt to look upon that which his Lordship representeth as a *natural suspicion* to be the most unreasonable supposition in the world. If an ambitious and self-interested clergy, and particularly the favourers of the papal hierarchy, had been to forge a gospel or sacred records to countenance their own claims, or if they had had it in their power to have corrupted and new-modelled them in their favour, the Christian religion and worship would in many instances have been very different from what it now appeareth to be in the sacred writings of the New Testament. Mr. Hobbes himself was so sensible of this, even where he inveighs against the clergy, as endeavouring to put their own laws upon the Christian people for the laws of God, and pretends that the books of the New Testament were in the first ages in the hands only of the Ecclesiastics, that he adds, "he is persuaded "they did not falsify the scripture; because, if they had had an "intention so to do, they would surely have made them more "favourable to their power over Christian princes, and civil "sovereignty, than they are †."

His Lordship on many occasions insinuates, that the original records of Christianity are not at all to be depended upon. He frequently repeats the charge of corruptions and interpolations; and particularly concludes the last Miscellany of his third volume with a heap of objections against the scriptures, drawn from the great number of copies, various readings, different glosses and interpretations, apocryphal and canonical books, frauds of those through whose hands they have been transmitted to us, &c. ‡.

\* Characterist. p. 336.

† Hobbes's Leviath. p. 203, 204.

‡ Characterist. vol. iii. p. 317—344.

These objections are put into the mouth of a gentleman, whom he makes go off the stage with an air of triumph, as if they were unanswerable: and yet they are no other than what have been frequently considered and obviated by the learned defenders of the Christian cause. Dr. Tindal hath since urged all these objections, and more of the same kind, more largely and with greater force than his Lordship had done; and a full answer hath been returned to them, sufficient to satisfy an impartial enquirer\*.

I have already dwelt longer on this right honourable author than I at first intended; but you will undoubtedly expect that, before I leave him, I should take some notice of that part of his scheme, where he seems to set up ridicule as the best and surest criterion of truth: This deserves the rather to be considered, because there is not perhaps any part of his writings, of which a worse use hath been made. I am sensible that some ingenious writers have been of opinion, that in this his Lordship has been greatly misunderstood or misrepresented: that his opinion, if fairly examined, amounts only to this, that ridicule may be of excellent use, either against ridicule itself, when false and misapplied, or against grave, specious, and delusive impostures: that he distinguishes between true and false ridicule, and between *genteel wit*, and *scurrilous buffoonry*, which, without decency or distinction, raises a laugh from every thing. This he condemneth, as justly offensive, and unworthy of a gentleman and a man of sense. He would have religion treated with *good manners*, and is for subjecting ridicule to the judgment of reason; and he declares, that as he is in *earnest in defending raillery*, so he can be *sober in the use of it*. Several passages are produced to this purpose†. But whatever apology may be made for this noble writer, I think it cannot be denied, that he has frequently expressed himself very incautiously on this head, and in a manner that may lead persons into a very wrong method of inquiring and judging concerning truth. He not only expressly calls ridicule a *test*, and a *criterion of truth*, but declares for applying it to every thing, and in all cases. He would have us carry the *rule* of ridicule constantly with us, *i. e.* that we must be always in a disposition to apply

\* See particularly Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. chap. 5. 7, 8.

† Characterist. vol. i. p. 11. 63, 83, 84, 85. 128.

ridicule to whatever offers, to see whether it will bear\*. He observes, that “ truth may bear all lights; and one of those principal lights or natural mediums, by which things are to be viewed in order to a thorough recognition, is ridicule itself, or that manner of proof (for so he calls it) by which we discern whatever is liable to just raillery on any subject †:” and though he doth not approve the seeking to *raise a laugh for every thing*, yet he thinks it right to *seek in every thing what justly may be laughed at ‡*. He declares that “ he hardly cares so much as to think on the subject of religion, much less to write on it, without endeavouring to put himself in as good a humour as possible §:” *i. e.* treating it, as he himself expresseth it, in a way of *wit and raillery, pleasantry and mirth*. And indeed what kind of ridicule his Lordship is for, and how he is for applying it in matters of religion, plainly appears from many specimens he has given us of it in several parts of his works; especially in his third volume, which is designed as a kind of review and defence of all his other treatises.

The best and wisest men in all ages have always recommended a calm attention and sobriety of mind, a cool and impartial examination and enquiry, as the properest disposition for finding out truth, and judging concerning it. But according to his Lordship's representation of the case, those that apply themselves to the searching out truth, or judging what is really true, serious, and excellent, must endeavour to put themselves in a merry humour, to raise up a gaiety of spirit, and seek whether in the object they are examining they cannot find out *something that may be justly laughed at*. And it is great odds, that a man who is thus disposed will find out something fit, as he imagines, to excite his mirth, in the most serious and important subject in the world. Such a temper is so far from being an help to a fair and unprejudiced enquiry, that it is one of the greatest hindrances to it. A strong turn to ridicule hath a tendency to disqualify a man for cool and sedate reflection, and to render him impatient of the pains that are necessary to a rational and deliberate search. A calm dispassionate love of truth, with a disposition to examine

\* Characterist. p. 11, 12.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 61.

‡ Ibid. p. 128.

§ Ibid. p. 128.



carefully and judge impartially, and a prevailing inclination to jest and raillery, seldom meet together in the same mind. This discovereth rather an odd turn and vivacity of imagination, than strong reason and sound judgment; and it would be a strange attempt to set up wit and imagination, instead of reason and judgment, for a judge and umpire in matters of the greatest consequence.

Our noble author indeed frequently observes, that truth cannot be hurt by ridicule, since, when the ridicule is wrong placed, it will not hold. "Nothing is ridiculous, but what is deformed, nor is any thing proof against raillery, but what is handsome and just: this weapon therefore can never bear an edge against virtue and honesty, and bears against every thing contrary to it\*." It will be readily allowed, that truth and honesty cannot be the subject of *just* ridicule; but then this supposeth, that ridicule itself must be brought to the test of cool reason: and accordingly his Lordship acknowledges, that it is *in reality a serious study to temper and regulate that humour*†. And thus after all, we are to return to gravity and serious reason as the ultimate test and criterion of ridicule, and of every thing else. But though the most excellent things cannot be justly ridiculed, and ridicule, when thus applied, will, in the judgment of wise and thinking men, render him that useth it ridiculous; yet there are many persons on whom it will have a very different effect. The ridicule will be apt to create prejudices in their minds, and to inspire them with a contempt, or at least a disregard of things, which, when represented in a proper light, appear to be of the greatest worth and importance. *The face of truth* indeed, as his Lordship observes, *is not less fair and beautiful for all the counterfeit vizards that have been put upon it*; yet these vizards may so conceal and disguise its beauty, as to make it look a quite different thing from what it really is. It cannot be denied, that truth, piety, and virtue, have often been the subjects of ridicule; and bad, but witty, men have met with too much success in exposing them to the derision and contempt, instead of recommending them to the esteem and veneration, of mankind. It is our author's own observation, that *false earnest is ridiculed, but the*

\* Characterist. vol. i. p. 11. 128, 129.

† Ibid. p. 128.

*false*

*false jest passes secure.* And though he says, he cannot conceive how any man should be *laughed out of his wits*, as some have been *frightened out of them*, yet there have been and are too many instances of persons that have been laughed out of their religion, honesty, and virtue. Weak and unstable minds have been driven into atheism, profaneness, and vice, by the force of ridicule, and have been made ashamed of that which they ought to esteem their glory.

His Lordship is pleased to represent ridicule as the fittest way of dealing with *enthusiasts*, and *venders of miracles and prophecy*; and having mentioned the reveries of the French prophets, and recommended *Bartlemy-Fair drollery*, as proper to be used on such occasions, he gives a broad hint, that if this method had been taken against the reformation, or against Christianity at its first rise, it would have been effectual to destroy it, without having recourse to persecution\*. He has here plainly let us know in what light he regardeth our holy religion. On other occasions, he declares only for genteel raillery: but here it seems what he calls the *Bartlemy-Fair method*, which I believe will hardly pass for very genteel raillery, is supposed to be sufficient, not only against that set of *enthusiasts* who were called the French prophets, but against Christianity itself. But he seems not to have considered, that the great author and first publishers of the Christian religion were scoffed and derided, as well as exposed to grievous sufferings and torments, and that they had *trial of cruel mockings*, as well as of *bonds and imprisonments*. It appears from what remains of the works of Celsus, as well as from what Cæcilius saith in Minucius Felix, that no sarcasm or ridicule was spared among the heathens, by which they thought they could expose Christianity; though when they found this ineffectual to suppress it, they from time to time had recourse to more violent and sanguinary methods: and indeed those that have been most prone to scoff at religion and truth have often been most prone to persecute it too. A scornful and contemptuous spirit, which is an usual attendant on ridicule, is apt to proceed to farther extremes; nor am I sure, that they, who on all occasions throw out the bitterest sarcasms against religion and its ministers, would not, if it were in their power, give more sub-

\* Characterist. vol. i. p. 28, 29.

stantial proofs of their averſion. His Lordſhip indeed honoureth that raillery and ridicule which he recommends, with the name of *good-humour*; and by ſhuffling one of theſe for the other, and playing upon the words, maketh himſelf merry with his reader. But *good-humour* taken in the beſt ſenſe, for what he calls the *ſweeteſt, kindeſt diſpoſition*, is a different thing from that ſneering faculty, which diſpoſes men to caſt contempt upon perſons and things, and which is often managed in a manner little conſiſtent with a true benevolence.

The proper uſe of ridicule is to expoſe ſuch follies and abſurdities as ſcarce deſerve or admit a very ſerious conſideration; but to recommend raillery and ridicule as fit to be employed on all occaſions, and upon the moſt weighty and important ſubjects, and as the propereſt means for diſcerning truth, appears to be an inverting the juſt order of things. It is, even when innocently uſed, for the moſt part a trifling employment; and a man of great genius cannot addiſt himſelf much to it, without deſcending beneath his character. Indeed there needs no more to give one a diſguſt at this pretended teſt of truth, than to conſider the uſe his Lordſhip has made of it. When he is in any degree ſerious, he ſhews how capable he is to inform and pleaſe his reader; but when he gives a looſe to gaiety and ridicule, he often writes in a manner unworthy of himſelf. And I am apt to think, that if nothing of his had been publiſhed, but the two firſt treatiſes of his firſt volume, and the third volume, in which he chiefly indulges himſelf in thoſe liberties, he would have generally paſſed in the world for a ſprightly and ingenious, but very trifling writer. He often throws out his sneers and ſlirts againſt every thing that comes in his way; and with a mixture of low and ſolemn phraſe, and grave ridicule, he ſometimes manages it ſo, that it is not very eaſy to diſcern his true ſentiments; and what it is that he really aims at. This is not very conſiſtent with the rule he himſelf has laid down more than once; viz. That “it is a mean, “impotent, and dull ſort of wit, which leaves ſenſible perſons “in a doubt, and at a loſs to underſtand what one’s real mind “is.” And again he cenſures “ſuch a feigned gravity, as immoral “and illiberal, foreign to the character of a good writer, a gentle- “man, and a man of ſenſe\*.” There ſeems to be no other way

\* Characteriſt, vol. i. p. 63, vol. iii. p. 225.

of screening him from his own censure, but by supposing, that he imaginèd his true intention with regard to Christianity and the holy Scriptures might be perceived by any sensible person, through his concealed ridicule. And it must be acknowledged that, for the most part, it is so; though, in some particular places, it is hard to know whether he be in jest or earnest. By this covered way of ridicule he sometimes steals upon the reader before he is aware, and, under the guise of a friend, gives a more dangerous blow, than if he had acted the part of an open and avowed enemy.

Upon the whole it may be justly said, that in this noble and ingenious author we have a remarkable instance of the wrong application of that talent of ridicule, of which he was so great a master. And if it has succeeded ill in his hands, how much more may it be expected to do so in those who, for want of his genius, are not able to rise above low buffoonry, nor capable of distinguishing gross and scurrilous raillery and scandal from wit and delicate ridicule! His Lordship hath since had many awkward imitators, and probably will have more, who will be apt to apply his test of ridicule, not only, as he himself hath given them an example, against revealed religion, but against all religion, even that which is called natural, and against that virtue, of which, in his serious moods, he hath professed himself so great an admirer.

I shall conclude my account of this celebrated author with observing, that the *Characteristics* have been attacked, or at least some particular passages in them have been occasionally animadverted upon, by several learned writers, by bishop Berkley, Dr. Wotton, Dr. Warburton, and others. That part of his Lordship's scheme which represents a regard to future rewards, as derogating from the dignity and excellence of virtue, hath been particularly considered by Mr. Balguy, in a short but judicious tract, written, like his other tracts, in a very polite and masterly manner. It is intitled, *A Letter to a Deist, concerning the Beauty and Excellency of Moral Virtue, and the Support and Improvement which it receives from the Christian Revelation*, 8vo. 1729. But I know of none that has undertaken to answer the whole, but Mr. (now) Dr. John Brown, in a treatise intitled, *Essays on the Characteristics*, published in 1750. This work is divided into three essays: the first is on ridicule, considered as a test of truth:

the second is on the obligations of men to virtue, and the necessity of religious principles: the third is on revealed religion and Christianity. Under these several heads, he hath considered whatever appeared to be most obnoxious in the writings of our noble author.

The length of this letter may seem to need an apology. But you, I know, will agree with me, that as it was proper, in pursuance of the design in which I am engaged, to take notice of this admired writer, so it was necessary to make such observations as might help to obviate the prejudices so many are apt to entertain in his favour, to the disadvantage even of Christianity itself.

## L E T T E R VI.

*The Account given of the Earl of Shaftesbury's Writings in the foregoing Letter, vindicated against the Exceptions that had been made against it—The being influenced by the Hope of the Reward promised in the Gospel hath nothing in it disingenuous and slavish—It is not inconsistent with loving Virtue for its own sake, but tends rather to heighten our Esteem for its Worth and Amiableness—The Earl of Shaftesbury seems, in his Inquiry concerning Virtue, to erect such a Scheme of Virtue as is independent of Religion, and may subsist without it—The Apology he makes for doing so—The close Connection there is between Religion and Virtue shewn from his own Principles and Acknowledgments—Virtue not wholly confined to good Actions towards Mankind, but takes in proper Affections towards the Deity as an essential Part of it—He acknowledges that Man is born to Religion.—A remarkable Passage of Lord Bolingbroke's to the same Purpose.*

SIR,

**W**HEN I first published the *View of the Deistical Writers*, the foregoing letter contained the whole of what I then intended with regard to the observations on the Earl of Shaftesbury. But not long after the publication of it, some persons, who profess to be real friends to Christianity, and I doubt not are so, let me know that they wished I had not put his Lordship into the list of deistical writers: and they thought the charge against him had in some instances been carried too far. This put me upon revising what I had written relating to that matter, with great care: and if I had found just cause to think, that in this instance I had been mistaken in the judgment I had formed, I should have thought myself obliged publicly to acknowledge it. For when I formed the design of taking a view of the deistical writers, I fixed it as a rule to myself, to make a fair representation, as far as I was able, of the sentiments of those writers, and not to push the charge against them farther than there appeared to me to be just ground for. And it would have given

given me a real pleasure to have reason to rank so fine a writer as the Earl of Shaftesbury among the friends of the Christian cause. But upon the most impartial enquiry I was able to make, I have not seen reason to retract any thing I had offered with regard to that noble Lord. I thought it necessary therefore, in the *Supplement to the View of the Deistical Writers*, to publish a letter on that subject, which I shall here subjoin to the preceding one, that the reader may have all before him which relates to that noble writer in one view.

It can scarce, I think, be denied by any impartial person who hath read the *Characteristics* without prejudice, which are the only works he avowed, and which had his last hand, that there are several passages in them, which seem plainly intended to expose Christianity and the holy scriptures. And there is great reason to apprehend, that not a few have been unwarily led to entertain unhappy prejudices against revealed religion, and the authority of the scriptures, through too great an admiration of his Lordship's writings. Some instances of this kind have come under my own particular observation: and therefore it appeareth to me, upon the most mature consideration, that I could not, in consistency with the design I had in view, omit the making some observations upon that admired author, as far as the cause of Christianity is concerned.

That part of my observations on Lord Shaftesbury's works which I find hath been particularly excepted against, is the account given of his sentiments with regard to future rewards and punishments. It hath been urged, that his design in what he has written on this subject was, not to insinuate that we ought not to be influenced by a regard to future rewards and punishments, the usefulness of which he plainly acknowledgeth; but only to shew, that it is wrong to be actuated merely by a view to the reward, or by a fear of the punishment, without any real inward love to virtue, or any real hatred and abhorrence of vice. To this purpose his Lordship observes, that "to be bribed only, or terrified into an honest practice, bespeaks little of real honesty or worth; and that if virtue be not really estimable in itself, he can see nothing estimable in following it for the sake of a bargain\*." He asks, "how shall we deny that

\* *Characterist.* vol. i. p. 97.

to serve God by compulsion, or for interest merely, is servile and mercenary \*?" And he puts the case of a person's being incited by the hope of reward to do the good he hates, and restrained by the fear of punishment from doing the ill to which he is not otherwise in the least degree averse;" and observes, that "there is in this case no virtue whatsoever †." If his Lordship had said no more than this, he would have said no more than every real friend to Christianity will allow; though in this case there would still be great reason to complain, of his Lordship's having made a very unfair representation of the sense of those divines, who think it necessary to urge the motives drawn from future rewards and punishments. It is true, that if the belief of future retributions should have no other effect than the putting some restraint upon men's outward evil actions, and regulating their external behaviour, even this would be of great advantage to the community: but this is far from being the only or principal thing intended. Those certainly must know little of the nature and tendency of the Christian religion, who should endeavour to persuade themselves or others, that though a man had a real love of vice in his heart, and only abstained from some outward vicious practices for fear of punishment; and though he had an inward aversion to true goodness and virtue, and only performed some outward acts that had a fair appearance; this alone would denominate him a good man, and intitle him to the future reward: for this were to suppose, that though he were really a vicious and bad man, without that purity and sincerity of heart on which the scriptures lay so great a stress, yet the practising some external acts of obedience, destitute of all true goodness, and of virtuous affections, would intitle him to the favour of God, and to that eternal happiness which is promised in the gospel. If any persons should teach this, I would readily join with his Lordship in condemning them. But he hath not contented himself with striking at the supposed wrong sentiments of divines, whom he loves on all occasions to expose. There are several passages in his Lordship's writings, which appear to be directly intended to represent the insisting, so much as is done in the gospel, upon the eternal rewards and punishments

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 272.

† Ibid. p. 55.



of a future state, as having a bad influence on the moral temper and particularly as tending to strengthen an inordinate selfishness, and to diminish the affections towards public good, and to make men neglect what they owe to their friends, and to the country. He plainly intimates the disadvantages accruing to virtue from the having *infinite rewards* in view, and that in the case the *common and natural motives to goodness are apt to be neglected, and lose much by disuse*\*. He represents the being influenced by a regard to future rewards and punishments as at the best *disingenuous, servile, and of the slavish kind*; and to this he opposes a *liberal service, and the principle of love, and the loving God and virtue for God and virtue's sake*†: and accordingly he determines, that those duties, to which men are carried without any view to such rewards, are for that reason more noble and excellent, and argue a higher degree of virtue. If the case really were as his Lordship is pleased to represent it, it must certainly give a very disadvantageous idea of Christianity: as if the insisting upon those most important motives, drawn from a future eternal world, which our Saviour came to set in the strongest light, tended to introduce and cherish a wrong temper of mind, narrow and selfish, disingenuous and servile, to weaken our benevolent affections both public and private, and to take off from the duties and offices of the civil and social life. At that rate, it could not be said that the gospel is a friend to society and to mankind; and instead of promoting the practice of true virtue it would rather derogate from it, and degrade it from its propriety and excellence. It was therefore necessary to shew, I endeavoured to do in my observations on Lord Shaftesbury's writings, that this is far from being a just representation of the nature and tendency of the Christian doctrine of future rewards and punishments. The most noble and extensive benevolence exerting itself in all proper effects and instances, in opposition to a narrow selfish disposition, is what Christianity every where recommendeth and enforceth in the most engaging manner; and it is its peculiar advantage, that it carrieth our views to a better

\* Several passages to this purpose were produced out of the Characteristics in the preceding Letter, which I need not here repeat.

† See Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 271, 272, 273.

State, where the benevolence which is now begun shall be completed, and shall be exercised in a more enlarged sphere, and extend to a nobler society. And can the hope of this possibly tend to diminish our benevolence, or must it not rather heighten and improve it? When a man hath a firm and steady persuasion, that the Supreme Being will reward his persevering constancy in a virtuous course with everlasting felicity, this, instead of weakening his inward affection to virtue, and his moral sense of its worth and excellency, must in the nature of things greatly confirm and establish it. There is therefore an entire consistency between the loving virtue for its own sake, *i. e.* as his Lordship explains it, *because it is amiable in itself\**, and the being animated to the pursuit and practice of it by such rewards as the gospel proposeth: for it never appears more excellent and lovely, than when it is considered as recommending us to the favour and approbation of Him, who is the supreme original Goodness and Excellence, and as preparing us for a complete happiness in a future state, where it shall be raised to the highest degree of beauty and perfection. In like manner it must mightily strengthen our abhorrence of vice, and our sense of its turpitude and malignity, to consider it as not only at present injurious and disgraceful to our nature, but as an opposition to the will and law of the most wise and righteous Governor of the world, who will in a future state of retribution inflict awful punishments upon those who now obstinately persist in a presumptuous course of vice and wickedness.

Our noble author himself, when he proposeth to shew *what obligation there is to virtue, or what reason to embrace it*, which is the subject of the second book of his *Inquiry*, resolveth it into this: that *moral rectitude or virtue must be the advantage, and vice the misery and disadvantage of every creature; and that it is the creature's interest to be wholly good and virtuous*†. To prove this seems to be the entire design of that book, which he concludes with observing, that *virtue is the good, and vice the ill of every one*. He seems indeed, in displaying the advantages of the one and disadvantages of the other, to confine himself wholly to this present life, and to abstract from all consideration of a future state. But if the representing virtue be to our interest

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 67.

† Ibid. p. 81. 98.

here on earth, and conducive to our present happiness, be a just—ground of *obligation to virtue*, and a proper *reason to embrace it*, which his second book is designed to shew, then surely, if it can be proved, that it tendeth not only to our happiness here, but to procure us a perfect happiness in a future state of existence, this must mightily heighten the obligation to virtue, and strengthen the reason for embracing it. If having regard to the present advantages of virtue be consistent in his scheme with loving virtue for its own sake, and as amiable in itself, and doth not render the embracing it a mercenary or slavish service, why should it be inconsistent with a liberal service to be assured that it shall make us happy for ever? Or why should they be accounted greater friends or admirers of virtue, who consider its excellency only with regard to the narrow limits of this transitory life, than they who regard it as extending its beneficial influence to a nobler state of existence, and who believe that it shall flourish in unfading beauty and glory to eternity? That an affection in itself worthy and excellent should grow less so, by considering it as so pleasing to the Supreme Being, that he will reward it with everlasting happiness, and raise it to the highest perfection it is capable of in a future state, would be a strange way of reasoning.

It was observed in the account given of the Earl of Shaftesbury's writings, in the preceding letter, that there are several passages in which he acknowledgeth, that the hope of future rewards, and fear of future punishments, is a great advantage, security, and support to virtue. If these passages had been concealed or disguised, there might have been just ground of complaint. But they were fairly laid before the reader, as well as those that seemed to be of a contrary import, that he might be able to form a judgment of his Lordship's sentiments, how far he is consistent with himself, and whether the censures be well founded, which he passeth upon those who insist upon the rewards promised in the gospel as powerful motives to virtue. He chargeth them as "reducing religion to such a philosophy, as to leave no room for the principle of love—and as building a future state on the ruins of virtue, and thereby betraying religion and the cause of God\*." He representeth them as if they were against a *liberal service, flow-*

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 272. 279.

ing from an esteem and love of God, or a sense of duty and gratitude, and a love of the dutiful and grateful part, as good and amiable in itself\*. And he expressly declareth, that “the hope of future reward, and fear of future punishment, cannot consist in reality with virtue or goodness, if it either stands as essential to any moral performance, or as a *considerable motive* to any act, of which some better affection ought alone to be a sufficient cause †.” Here he seems not willing to allow, that the regard to future retributions ought to be so much as a *considerable motive* to well-doing; and asserteth, that to be influenced by it as such a motive cannot consist in reality with virtue or goodness. This is in effect to say, that we ought not to be influenced by a regard to future rewards and punishments at all: for if they be believed and regarded at all, they must be a considerable motive; since, as he himself observes, where infinite rewards are firmly believed, they must needs have a mighty influence, and will overbalance other motives ‡. If therefore it be inconsistent with true virtue or goodness, to be influenced by them as a considerable motive, it is wrong to propose them to mankind: for why should they be proposed, or to what purpose believed, if it be inconsistent with true goodness to be influenced by them in proportion to their worth or importance? His Lordship elsewhere observes, “that, by making rewards and punishments” (*i. e.* the rewards and punishments proposed in the gospel; for to these he evidently refers) “the principal motives to duty, the Christian religion in particular is overthrown, and the greatest principle, that of love, rejected §.” When he here brings so heavy a charge against those who make the rewards of the gospel their *principal motives*, his meaning seems to be this: That they make the hope of future eternal happiness a more powerful motive than the present satisfaction and advantages virtue hath a tendency to produce, which are the motives he so largely insists upon, and which he calls *the common and natural motives to goodness*. And is the being more animated by the consideration of that eternal happiness which is the promised reward of virtue, than by any of the advantages it yields in this present state (though these also

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 270.

‡ Ibid. p. 68.

† Ibid. p. 58.

§ Ibid. p. 279.

are allowed to have their proper weight and influence) so great a fault, as to deserve to be represented as a subverting of all religion, and particularly the Christian? If the eternal life promised in the gospel be rightly understood, the hope of it includeth a due regard to the glory of God, to our own highest happiness, and to the excellence of virtue and true holiness; all which are here united, and are the worthiest motives that can be proposed to the human mind. There is a perfect harmony between this hope, and what his Lordship so much extols, the principle of divine love, *such as separates from every thing worldly, sensual, and meanly interested*: nor can it be justly said, concerning this hope of the gospel reward, what he saith of *a violent affection towards private good*, that the more there is of it, *the less room there is for an affection towards goodness itself, or any good and deserving object, worthy of love and admiration for its own sake, such as God is universally acknowledged to be*\*. The very reward itself includeth the perfection of love and goodness; and the happiness promised principally consisteth in a conformity to God, and in the fruition of him; and therefore the being powerfully animated with the hope of it is perfectly consistent with *the highest love and admiration of the Deity, on account of his own infinite excellency*.

It appeareth to me, upon considering and comparing what hath been produced out of Lord Shaftesbury's writings, that though his Lordship's good sense would not allow him absolutely to deny the usefulness of believing future retributions, yet he hath in effect endeavoured on several occasions to cast a slur upon Christianity, for proposing and insisting upon what he calls *infinite rewards*: and thus he hath attempted to turn that to its disadvantage which is its greatest glory, *viz.* its setting the important retributions of a future state in the clearest and strongest light, and teaching us to raise our affections and views to things invisible and eternal. His Lordship hath, upon the most careful and diligent revival of his works, suffered those obnoxious passages still to continue there. Nor will any man wonder at this, who considereth the design and tendency of many other passages in his writings: That he hath taken occasion to ridicule the spirit of

\* Characteristics, vol. ii. p. 58, 59.

prophecy, and to burlesque several passages of holy writ: That he hath represented the scriptures as absolutely uncertain, and the important facts by which Christianity is attested, as not to be depended upon: That he hath insinuated injurious reflections upon the character and intentions of the blessed Founder of our holy religion: That he hath represented our faith in the gospel as having no other foundation than the authority of the state; and hath hinted, that it could hardly have stood the test of ridicule, and even of *Bartholomew-Fair drollery*, had it been applied to it at its first appearance\*.

As I have been engaged so far in an examination of Lord Shaftesbury's writings, I shall take this occasion to make some farther observations on his celebrated *Inquiry concerning Virtue*.

He sets out with observing, that "religion and virtue appear to be so nearly related, that they are generally presumed inseparable companions: but that the practice of the world does not seem in this respect to be answerable to our speculations:" That "many who have had the appearance of great zeal in religion, have yet wanted the common affections of *humanity* †. Others again, who have been considered as mere atheists, have yet been observed to practise the rules of morality, and act in many cases with such good meaning and affection towards mankind, as might seem to force an acknowledgment of their being virtuous ‡." His Lordship therefore proposeth to inquire, "What honesty or virtue is, considered by itself, and in what manner it is influenced by religion: how far religion necessarily implies virtue: and whether it be a true saying, that it is impossible for an atheist to be virtuous, or share any real degree of honesty and merit §."

In that part of the *Inquiry*, in which he proposeth to shew what virtue is, he seems to make it properly consist in good affections towards mankind, or in a man's having "his disposition of mind and temper suitable and agreeing to the good of his kind, or of

\* See all this clearly shewn, p. 63, & seq.

† It will readily be acknowledged, that the appearance of religion is often separated from true virtue: but real practical religion necessarily comprehendeth virtue; and as far as we are deficient in the practice of virtue, we are deficient in what religion indispensably requireth of us.

‡ Chara&erist. vol. ii. p. 5, 6.

§ Ibid. p. 7.

“ the system in which he is included, and of which he constituteth “ a part \*.” And he had before declared, that some who have been considered as mere atheists have acted with such good affection towards mankind, as might seem to force an acknowledgment that they are virtuous.

And as this is the notion his Lordship gives of the nature of virtue; so when he treats of the obligation to virtue, and the reason there is to embrace it, which is the subject of the second book of the *Inquiry*, he seems to place it in its tendency to promote our happiness in this present life, without taking any notice of a future state.

Accordingly, many have looked upon the *Inquiry* as designed to set up such a notion of virtue and its obligations, as is independent on religion, and may subsist without it. And in the progress of that *Inquiry*, his Lordship takes occasion to compare atheism with superstition or false religion, and plainly gives the former the preference; and seems sometimes to speak tenderly of it. Having observed, that nothing can possibly, in a rational creature, exclude a principle of virtue, or render it ineffectual, except what either, “ 1. Takes away the natural and just sense “ of right and wrong: 2. Or creates a wrong sense of it: 3. Or “ causes the right sense of it to be opposed by contrary affec- “ tions †:” As to the first case, the taking away the natural sense of right and wrong, he will not allow that atheism, or any speculative opinion, persuasion, or belief, is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it; and that it can do it no other way than *indirectly* by the intervention of opposite affections, *casually* excited by such belief ‡. As to the second case, the *wrong sense*, or *false imagination of right and wrong*, he says, that, “ however atheism may be indirectly an occasion “ of men’s losing a good and sufficient sense of right and wrong, “ it will not, as atheism merely, be the occasion of setting up a “ false species of it; which only false religion, or fantastical “ opinion, derived immediately from superstition and credulity, “ is able to effect §.” As to the third case, which renders a principle of virtue ineffectual, *viz.* its being opposed by contrary

\* See Characterist. vol. ii. p. 31. 77, 78. 86, 87, & passim.

† Ibid. p. 40.

‡ Ibid. p. 44, 45.

§ Ibid. p. 46. 51, 52.

affections,

affections, he says, that "atheism, though it be plainly deficient, and without remedy, in the case of ill judgment on the happiness of virtue, yet it is not indeed of necessity the cause of such ill judgment: for without an absolute assent to any hypothesis of theism, the advantages of virtue may possibly be seen and owned, and a high opinion of it established in the mind\*."

Our noble author was sensible of the offence he had given, by seeming to speak favourably of atheists, and by erecting a system of virtue independent of religion, or the belief of a Deity; and in a treatise he published some years after the *Inquiry*, intitled, *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody*, makes an apology for it: That "he has endeavoured to keep the fairest measures he could with men of this sort," (*viz.* atheistical persons, and men of no religion) "alluring them all he was able, and arguing with a perfect indifferency even on the subject of a Deity; having this one chief aim and intention, how in the first place to concile those persons to the principles of virtue; that by this means a way might be laid open to religion, by removing those greatest, if not only obstacles to it, which arise from the vices and passions of men: That it is upon this account chiefly he endeavours to establish virtue upon principles by which he is able to argue with those, who are not yet inclined to own a God; or future state.—He owns, he has made virtue his chief subject, and in some measure independent on religion; yet he fancies he may possibly appear at last as high a divine as he is a moralist:"—And says, "He will venture to affirm, that whoever sincerely defends virtue, and is a realist in morality, must of necessity in a manner, by the same scheme of reasoning, prove as very a realist in divinity †." And elsewhere he says, that "we may justly as well as charitably conclude, that it was his design, in applying himself to the men of looser principles, to lead them into such an apprehension of the constitution of mankind, and of human affairs, as might form in them a notion of order in things, and draw hence an acknowledgment of the wisdom, goodness, and beauty, which is Supreme; that being thus far become profelytes, they might be prepared for that divine love which our religion would teach them,

\* *Characterist.* vol. ii. p. 69.

† *Ibid.* p. 266, 267, 268.



“ when once they should embrace it, and form themselves to its sacred character \*.”

This must be owned to be a handsome apology: so that if we take his Lordship's own account of his intention in his *Inquiry*, it was not to favour atheism, but rather to reclaim men from it; to reconcile atheists to the principles of virtue, and thereby bring them to a good opinion of religion. It may no doubt be of real service to the interests of virtue, to endeavour to make men sensible of its great excellence in itself, and its present natural advantages, which his Lordship sets forth at large, and in a very elegant manner: and this is no more than hath been often represented by those divines, who yet think it necessary to insist on the rewards and punishments of a future state. There are indeed many that have said, what no man who knows the world and the history of mankind can deny, that in the present situation of human affairs, a steady adherence to virtue often subjects a man to severe trials and sufferings; and that it frequently happeneth, that bad and vicious men are in very prosperous outward circumstances; but I scarce know any that have maintained what his Lordship calls that *unfortunate opinion*, viz. that “ virtue is *naturally* an enemy to happiness in life;” or who suppose, that “ virtue is the *natural ill*, and vice the *natural good* of any creature †.” Nor would any friend to Christianity have found fault with his Lordship's endeavouring to shew, that by the very frame of the human constitution, virtue has a friendly influence to promote our satisfaction and happiness, even in this present life; and that vice has naturally a contrary tendency. But certainly it was no way necessary to his design, supposing it to have been, as he professes, to serve the cause of virtue in the world, to throw out so many insinuations as he has done against the being influenced by a regard to future rewards and punishments; as if it argued a higher degree of virtue to have no regard to them at all. And though in several passages he shews the advantage which arises to virtue from religion and the belief of a deity, yet whilst he seems to allow that virtue may subsist, and even be carried to a considerable degree without it, I am afraid it will give encouragement to those he calls *the men of looser*

\* Characteristic, p. 279.

\* Ibid. p. 71, 72.

*principles*; and that instead of reclaiming them from atheism, it will tend to make them easy in it, by leading them to think they may be good and virtuous men without any religion at all.

His Lordship seems, from a desire of *keeping the fairest measures*, as he expresses it, *with men of this sort*, to have carried his complaisance too far, when he asserts, that atheism has no direct tendency either to take away and destroy *the natural and just sense of right and wrong*, or to the setting up a *false species of it*. This is not a proper place to enter into a distinct consideration of this subject. I shall content myself with producing some passages from the most applauded doctor of modern atheism, Spinoza, and who hath taken the most pains to form it into a system. He proposeth, in the fifteenth chapter of his *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, to treat of *the natural and civil right of every man. De jure uniuscujusque naturali & civili*. And the sum of his doctrine is this; that every man has a natural right to do whatever he has power to do, and his inclination prompts him to; and that the right extends as far as the force. By *natural right, or law, jus et institutum naturæ*, “ he understands nothing else “ but the rules of the nature of each individual; according to “ which it is determined to exist and act after a certain manner\*.”

And

\* Per jus & institutum naturæ nihil aliud intelligo, quam regulas naturæ uniuscujusque individui, secundum quas unumquodque naturaliter determinatum concipimus ad certo modo existendum & operandum. Ex. gr. pisces a natura determinati sunt ad natandum, magni ad minores comedendum, adeoque pisces summo naturali jure aqua potiuntur, & magni minores comedunt —“ Sequitur unumquodque individuum jus summum habere ad omnia quæ potest.—Nec hic ullam agnoscimus differentiam inter homines & reliqua naturæ individua, neque inter homines ratione præditos, & inter alios qui veram rationem ignorant, neque inter fatuos, delirantes, & fanos.” Quare inter homines quamdiu sub imperio solius naturæ vivere considerantur, tam ille qui rationem nondum novit, vel qui virtutis habitum nondum habet, ex solis legibus appetitus summo jure vivit, quam ille qui ex legibus rationis vitam suam dirigit. Hoc est, sicuti sapiens jus summum habet ad omnia quæ ratio dicitat, sive ex legibus rationis vivendi; sic etiam ignarus et animi impotens summum jus habet ad omnia quæ appetitus suadet, sive ex legibus appetitus vivendi. Jus itaque naturale uniuscujusque hominis, non sana ratione, sed cupiditate et potentia determinatur—Quicquid itaque unusquisque qui sub solo naturæ imperio consideratur, sibi utile vel dūbū sanæ rationis, vel ex affectuum impetu judicat, id summo naturæ jure appetere, et quacun-

And after having observed, that “ the large fishes are determined by nature to devour the smaller, and that therefore they have a natural right to do so,” and that “ every individual has the highest right to do all things which it has power to do;” he declares, that “ in this case he acknowledges no difference between men and other individuals of nature, nor between men that make a right use of their reason and those that do not so; nor between wise men and fools: That he who does not yet know reason, or has not attained to a habit of virtue, hath as much the highest natural right to live according to the sole laws of appetite, and to do what that inclines him to, as he that directs his life by the rules of reason hath to live according to reason.” Accordingly, he directly asserts, “ that the natural right of every man is determined not by sound reason, but by inclination, or appetite and power: That therefore whatever any man, considered as under the sole government of nature, judges to be useful for himself, whether led by sound reason, or prompted by his passions, he has the highest natural right to endeavour to procure it, for himself any way he can, whether by force or fraud; and consequently to hold him for an enemy, who would hinder him from gratifying his inclination; and that from hence it follows, that the right and law of nature, under which all are born, and for the most part live, only prohibits that which a man does not desire, or which is out of his power; nor is it averse to contentions, hatred, wrath, de-

que ratione, sive vi, sive dolo, sive precibus, sive quocunque demum modo facilius poterit, ipse capere licet, et consequenter pro hoste habere eum, qui impedire vult, quo minus animum expleat suum. Ex quibus scquitur jus institutum naturæ sub quo omnes nascuntur, et maxima ex parte vivunt, nihil nisi quod nemo cupit, et nemo potest, prohibere; non contentiones, non odia, non iram, non dolos, nec absolute aliquid quod appetitus suadet, aversari. Nec mirum, nam natura non legibus humane rationis, quæ non nisi verum utile et conversationem intendunt, sed infinitis aliis, quæ totius naturæ, cujus homo particula est, æternum ordinem respiciunt: ex cujus sola necessitate, omnia individua certo modo determinantur ad existendum et operandum.—Ostendimus jus naturale sola potentia cujusque determinari.—Nemo, nisi promisso aliud accedat, de fide alterius potest esse certus, quandoquidem unusquisque naturæ jure dolo agere potest; nec pactis stare tenetur, nisi spe majoris boni, vel metu majoris mali.—Tract. Theol. Polit. cap. xvi.

“ ceit,

“ ceit, or to any thing that the appetite puts him upon. And no wonder; for nature is not confined within the laws of human reason, which only intend the true benefit of mankind, but depends upon infinite other things which respect the eternal order of universal nature, of which man is only a minute part; from the necessity of which alone all individuals are determined to exist and operate after a certain manner.” He often repeats it in that chapter, that “ natural right is only determined by the power of every individual.” And he expressly asserts, that “ no man can be sure of another man’s fidelity, except he think it his interest to keep his promise; since every man has a natural right to act by fraud or deceit, nor is obliged to stand to his engagements, but from the hope of greater good, or fear of greater ill.”

I think it must be owned, that these principles have not merely an *indirect* and *casual*, but a plain and direct tendency, to take away or pervert the natural sense of *right* and *wrong*, or to introduce a false species of it, if the substituting power and inclination instead of reason and justice can be accounted so. This is to argue consequentially from atheism, when all things are resolved into nature and eternal necessity, by which are understood the necessary effects of matter and motion. Spinoza indeed owns, that it is more profitable to live according to the dictates of reason, or the prescriptions of the civil laws, than merely according to appetite or natural right. But whilst men think they have the highest natural right to do whatever they have power to do, and inclination prompts them to, civil laws will be but feeble ties, and bind a man no farther than when he has not power, or thinks it not for his interest to break them. Virtue and vice, fidelity and fraud, are on a level: the one equally founded in natural right as the other: and how any man can be truly virtuous upon this scheme I cannot see.

It appears to me therefore, that, instead of endeavouring to shew that virtue may subsist without religion, or the belief of a God and a future state, one of the most important services that can be done to mankind is to shew the close connection there is between religion and virtue or good order, and that the latter cannot be maintained without the former. And this indeed plainly follows from some of the principles laid down by our noble author in his *Inquiry*.

Although he seems to have intended to shew, that an atheist may be really virtuous; and observes, in a passage cited above, that, without the belief of a Deity, “the advantages of virtue may possibly be seen and owned, and a high opinion of it established in the mind,” he there adds, “however it must be confessed, that the natural tendency of atheism is very different\*.” Where he seems plainly to allow, that atheism is *naturally* an enemy to virtue, and that the direct tendency of it is to hinder the mind from entertaining a right opinion of virtue, or from having a due sense of its advantages. And elsewhere, speaking of the atheistical belief, he observes, that it “tends to the weaning the affections from every thing amiable and self-worthy: for how little disposed must a person be to love or admire any thing as orderly in the universe, who thinks the universe itself a pattern of disorder †!” To this may be added another remarkable passage, in which his Lordship declares, that “he who only doubts of a God may possibly lament his own unhappiness, and wish to be convinced: but that he who denies a Deity is daringly presumptuous, and sets up an opinion against the sentiments of mankind, and being of society:” Where he seems plainly to pronounce, that atheism is subversive of all virtue, which in his scheme hath an essential relation to society, and the good of the public. And accordingly he adds, “that it is easily seen, that one of these” (*viz.* he that only doubts) “may bear a due respect to the magistrates and laws, but not the other,” (*viz.* he that denies a Deity), “who being obnoxious to them is justly punishable ‡.”

Several passages might be produced, in which his Lordship represents the tendency religion hath to promote virtue. He observes, that “nothing can more highly contribute to the fixing of right apprehensions, and a sound judgment or sense of right and wrong, than to believe a God, who is represented such, as to be a true model or example of the most exact justice, and highest goodness and worth §!” And again, that “this belief must undoubtedly serve to raise and increase the affection towards virtue, and help to submit and subdue all other affections to this alone.—And that, when this theistical belief is intire and

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 69.

‡ Ibid. p. 260.

† Ibid. p. 70.

§ Ibid. p. 51.

“perfect,

“ perfect, there must be a steady opinion of the superintendency  
 “ of a Supreme Being, a witness and spectator of human life, and  
 “ conscious of whatsoever is felt or acted in the universe; so that  
 “ in the perfectest recess, or deepest solitude, there must be one  
 “ still presumed remaining with us, whose presence singly must  
 “ be of more moment than that of the most august assembly upon  
 “ earth: and that in such a presence, as the *shame* of guilty ac-  
 “ tions must be the greatest of any, so must the honour be of  
 “ well-doing, even under the unjust censures of a world. And  
 “ in this case it is very apparent, how conducing a perfect theism  
 “ must be to virtue, and how great a deficiency there is in athe-  
 “ ism\*.” He shews, that “ where by the violence of rage,  
 “ lust, or any other counter-working passions, the good affection  
 “ may frequently be controuled and overcome—if religion inter-  
 “ posing creates a belief, that the ill passions of this kind, no less  
 “ than their consequent actions, are the objects of a Deity’s ani-  
 “ madversion; it is certain, that such a belief must prove a sea-  
 “ sonable remedy against vice, and be in a particular manner  
 “ advantageous to virtue†. And he concludes the first book of  
 the *Inquiry concerning Virtue* with observing, that “ we may  
 “ hence determine justly the relation which virtue has to piety:  
 “ the first not being complete but in the latter. And thus,” saith  
 he, “ the perfection and height of virtue must be owing to the  
 “ belief of a God‡.

From these passages it sufficiently appears, that those who would separate virtue from religion cannot properly plead Lord Shaftesbury’s authority for it. And indeed not only is religion a friend to virtue, and of the highest advantage to it, but as it signifies proper affections and dispositions towards the Supreme Being, is itself the noblest virtue. It is true, that his Lordship seems frequently to place virtue wholly in good affections towards mankind. But this appears to be too narrow a notion of it. He himself makes *virtue* and *moral rectitude* to be equivalent terms§; and moral rectitude seems as evidently and necessarily to include right affections towards God, as towards those of our own species. He that is deficient in this, must certainly be deficient in an ef-

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 57.

‡ Ibid. p. 76.

† Ibid. p. 60, 61.

§ Ibid. p. 77. 81.

sential branch of good affection, or moral rectitude. If a human creature could not be said to be rightly disposed, that was destitute of affections towards its natural parents, can he be said to be rightly disposed, who hath not a due affection towards the *Common Parent*, as Lord Shaftesbury calls him, of all intellectual beings? This noble writer describes virtue to be that which is beautiful, fair, and amiable in disposition and action. And he asks, "Whether there is on earth a fairer matter of speculation, a goodlier view or contemplation, than that of a *beautiful, proportioned, and becoming action*?" And is there any thing more beautiful, more justly proportioned, and more becoming, than the acting suitably to the relation we bear to the Supreme Being, and the serving, adoring, and honouring him, as far as we are capable of doing so? Is there such a beauty and harmony in good affections towards those of our own species, and must there not be still more beauty and excellency in having our minds formed to proper affections and dispositions towards our Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor, the *source and principle*, to use our author's expressions, *of all being and perfection, the supreme and sovereign beauty, the original of all which is good and amiable*? His Lordship speaks in the highest terms of the pleasing consciousness which is the effect of love or kind affections towards mankind. But certainly there is nothing that can yield more of a divine satisfaction, than that which ariseth from a consciousness of a man's having approved himself to the best of beings, and endeavoured to promote his glory in the world, and to fulfil the work he hath given us to do. And it will be readily acknowledged, that a necessary part of this work is the doing good to our fellow creatures.

The very notion he so frequently gives of virtue, as having an essential relation to a system, seems, if understood in its proper extent, to include religion, and cannot subsist without it. His Lordship indeed frequently explains this as relating to the system of the human species, to which we are particularly related, and of which we constitute a part. But he also represents the human system as only a part of the universal one, and observes, that "as man must be considered as having a relation abroad to the

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 105.

"system

“ system of his kind; so even the system of his kind to the animal system: this to the world (our earth), and this again to the bigger world, the universe\*.” And that “ having recognized this uniform consistent fabric, and owned the universal system, we must of consequence acknowledge an universal mind †.” He asserts, that “ good affection, in order to its being of the right kind, must be *intire*.” and that “ a partial affection, or social love in part, without regard to a complete society or whole, is in itself an inconsistency, and implies an absolute contradiction ‡.” But how can that affection to the system be said to be intire, or of the right kind, which hath no regard to the author of it, on whom the whole system, the order, and even the very being of it, absolutely depends? and without whom indeed there could be properly no system at all, nothing but disorder and confusion? On this occasion it will be proper to produce a remarkable passage in his third volume; where he observes, that “ if what he had advanced in his *Inquiry*, and in his following *Philosophic Dialogue*, be real, it will follow, that since man is so constituted by means of his rational part, as to be conscious of this his more immediate relation to the universal system, and principle of order and intelligence, he is not only by nature *sociable* within the limits of his own species or kind, but in a yet more generous and extensive manner. He is not only born to virtue, friendship, honesty, and faith, but to piety, adoration, and a generous surrender of his mind to whatever happens from the *Supreme Cause* or order of things, which he acknowledges intirely just and perfect §.”

I have insisted the more largely upon this, because many there are among us that talk highly of virtue, who yet seem to look upon religion to be a thing in which they have little or no concern. They allow that men are formed and designed to be useful to one another; but as to what is usually called piety towards God, or those acts of religion of which God is the immediate object, this does not enter at all into their notion of virtue or morality. They sly it as a matter of no consequence; and think they may be good and virtuous without it. But not to

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 286.

† Ibid. p. 290.

‡ Ibid. p. 110. 113, 114.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 224.



urge, that religion or a true regard to the deity is the best security for the right performance of every other part of our duty, and furnisheth the strongest motives and engagements to it (which certainly ought greatly to recommend it to every lover of virtue), there is nothing which seems to be capable of a clearer demonstration, from the frame of the human nature, and the powers and faculties with which man is endued, than that he alone, of all the species of beings in this lower world, is formed with a capacity for religion; and that consequently this was one principal design of his creation, and without which he cannot properly answer the end of his being. To what hath been produced from the Earl of Shaftesbury, I shall add the testimony of another writer, whom no man will suspect of being prejudiced in favour of religion, the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke: who, though he sometimes seems to make man only a higher kind of brute, and blames those who suppose that the soul of man was made to *contemplate God*, yet at other times finds himself obliged to acknowledge, that man was principally designed and formed for religion. Thus, in the specimen he gives of a meditation or soliloquy of a devout theist, he talks of feeling the superiority of his species; and adds, “ I should rouse in myself a grateful sense of these advantages above all others, that I am a creature capable of knowing, of adoring, and worshipping my Creator, capable of discovering his will in the law of my nature, and capable of promoting my happiness by obeying it\*.” And in another passage, after inveighing, as is usual with him, against the pride and vanity of philosophers and divines, in exalting man and flattering the pride of the human heart, he thinks fit to acknowledge, that “ man is a *religious* as well as *social* creature, made to know and adore his Creator, to discover and to obey his will: That greater powers of reason, and means of improvement, have been measured out to us than to other animals, that we might be able to fulfil the *superior* purposes of our *destination*, whereof religion is undoubtedly the chief: And that in these the elevation and pre-eminence of our species over the inferior animals consist †.” I think it plainly

\* Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 390, 391. See also to the same purpose, *ibid.* p. 340.

† *Ibid.* p. 470.

followeth

followeth, from what Lord Bolingbroke hath here observed, and which seems to be perfectly just and reasonable, that they who live in an habitual neglect of religion, are chargeable with neglecting the chief purpose of their being, and that in which the true glory and pre-eminence of the human nature doth principally consist: and that consequently they are guilty of a very criminal conduct, and which they can by no means approve to the great author of their existence, who gave them their noble powers, and to whom, as the wise and righteous Governor of the world, they must be accountable for their conduct.

I have been carried farther in my observations on this subject than I intended; but if this may be looked upon as a digression, I hope it will not be thought unsuitable to the main design I have in view.

I am, Sir, &c.

## L E T T E R VII.

Mr. Collins's Discourse of Free-thinking—He gives a long Catalogue of Divisions among the Clergy, with a View to shew the Uncertainty of the Christian Religion—His Attempt to prove that there was a general Corruption of the Gospels in the sixth Century—The Absurdity of this manifested—His Pretence that Friendship is not required in the Gospel, though strongly recommended by Epicurus, shewn to be vain and groundless—An Account of his Book, intitled, The Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion—The pernicious Design and Tendency of that Book shewn—He allows Christianity no Foundation but the allegorical, i. e. as he understands it, the false Sense of the Old Testament Prophecies—His Method unfair and disingenuous—Some Account of the principal Answers published against that Book, and against the Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered, which was designed to be a Defence of it.

SIR,

IN the year 1713 came out a remarkable treatise, which it will be necessary to take some notice of, intitled, *A Discourse of Free-thinking, occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect called Free-thinkers*. It was written by Anthony Collins, Esq. though published, as his other writings are, without his name. The same gentleman had in 1707 published an *Essay concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, the Evidence whereof depends upon human Testimony*: in which there are some good observations, mixed with others of a suspicious nature and tendency. In this essay there are animadversions upon some passages in a tract written by Dr. Francis Gastrel, afterwards Lord Bishop of Chester, intitled, *Some Considerations concerning the Trinity, and the Way of managing that Controversy*, published in 1702. To the third edition of which, published in 1707, that learned and judicious divine subjoined a vindication of it, in answer to Mr. Collins's essay. This gentleman also distinguished himself by writing against the immateriality and immortality of the human soul,

as

as he afterwards did against human liberty and free agency; and with regard to both these, was answered by Dr. Samuel Clarke, with that clearness and strength for which that author was so remarkable. The *Discourse of Free-thinking* is professedly intended to demonstrate the necessity and usefulness of free-thinking, from reason, and from the examples of the best and wisest men in all ages. But there is great reason to complain of a very unfair and disingenuous procedure throughout the whole book. He all along insinuates, that those who stand up for revealed religion are enemies to a just liberty of thought, and to a free examination and inquiry. His design is certainly levelled against Christianity, and yet he sometimes affects to speak of it with respect. He nowhere argues directly against it, but takes every occasion to throw out sneers and insinuations, which tend to raise prejudices in the minds of his readers. No small part of this book is taken up in invectives against the clergy, and in giving an account of the divisions that have been among them about the articles of the Christian faith. If there hath been any thing unwarily advanced by any of them, if they have vented any odd or absurd opinions, or have in the heat of dispute cast rash and angry censures upon one another, these things are here turned to the disadvantage of Christianity itself: as if this excellent religion were to be answerable for all the passions, follies, and exorbitancies of those that make profession of it: or, as if the differences which have been among Christians were a proof, that there is nothing in the Christian religion that can be safely depended upon. This indeed has been a standing topic for declamation in all the deistical writings, though it is founded upon a principle which is manifestly false, *viz.* that whatever has been at any time controverted is doubtful and uncertain: a principle which, as I had occasion to observe before, would set aside the most important truths of natural religion as well as revealed. But these gentlemen too often act, as if they were not very solicitous about the former, provided they could destroy the latter with it.

A great noise is raised in this *Discourse of Free-thinking*, about the pious frauds of ancient fathers and modern clergy, and their forging, corrupting, and mangling of authors; and it is insinuated, that they have altered and corrupted the Scriptures, as best served their own purposes and interests. Lord Shaftesbury had  
insinuated

infinuated the same thing before; and these clamours are continually renewed and repeated, though it hath been often shewn with the utmost evidence, that a general alteration and corruption of the holy Scriptures was, as the case was circumstanced, an impossible thing. And we have the plainest proof in fact, that even in the darkest and most corrupt ages of the Christian church, the Scriptures were not altered in favour of the corruptions and abuses which were then introduced; since no traces of those corruptions are to be found there: on the contrary, they furnish the most convincing arguments for detecting and exposing those corruptions.

But what he seems to lay the greatest stress upon, is a passage from Victor of Tmuis, in which it is said, that at the command of the emperor Anastasius, the holy gospels were corrected and amended. This our author calls *an account of a general alteration of the four gospels in the sixth century*: and he says, it was discovered by Dr. Mills, and was very little known before\*. But then he should have taken notice of what Dr. Mills has added, *viz.* that it is certain as any thing can be, that no such altered gospels were ever published; and that if the fact had been thus, it would have been mentioned with detestation by all the historians, and not be found only in one blind passage of a puny chronicle. Indeed there cannot be a plainer instance of the power of that prejudice and bigotry against Christianity, which has possessed the minds of the gentlemen that glory in the name of *Free-thinkers*, than their laying hold on such a story as this to prove a general corruption of the gospels, contrary to all reason and common sense. Let us suppose the emperor Anastasius to have had an intention to alter the copies of the gospels (which yet it is highly improbable he should attempt), he could only have got some of the copies into his hands: there would still have been vast numbers of copies spread through different parts of the empire, which he could not lay hold of, especially considering how much he was hated and opposed: or if we should make the absurd and impossible supposition of his being able to get all the copies throughout the east into his hands; yet as there were still innumerable copies in the west, where he had little or no power, they would have im-

\* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 89, 90.

mediately

mediately detected the alteration and corruption, if there had been any. Loud complaints would have been made of the attempt; but no such complaints were ever made: and in fact it is evident, that there have been no greater differences since that time between the eastern and western copies than there were before. And it is undeniably manifest, from great numbers of authors, who lived in the preceding ages, and whose works are come down to us, that the scriptures, a great part of which is transcribed into their writings, were the same before that pretended alteration, that they have been since.

With a view of shewing the uncertainty of the sacred text of the New Testament, this author takes notice of the various readings collected by Dr. Mills, which he says amount to thirty thousand. This objection has been so fully exposed, and this whole matter set in so clear a light by the famous Dr. Bentley, under the character of *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis*, that one should think it would have been for ever silenced. And yet it has been frequently repeated since by the writers on that side, and particularly by Dr. Tindal, in his *Christianity as old as the Creation*, without taking the least notice of the clear and satisfactory answer that had been returned to it.

The ancient prophets have been the constant objects of the sneers and reproaches of these gentlemen: and accordingly this writer has told us, that, *to obtain the prophetic spirit, they played upon music, and drank wine\**. That they might very lawfully and properly drink wine, in a country where there was great plenty of it, may well be allowed, without any diminution of their character; and that they employed music, particularly in singing praises to God, may be concluded from several passages in the sacred writings. But certainly, if they had the prophetic spirit at all, neither wine nor music gave it them, or could enable them to foretel things to come. But then he does them the honour to say, *they were great free-thinkers*, and that “they writ with “as great liberty against the established religion of the Jews “(which the people looked on as the institution of God himself), “as if they looked upon it all to be imposture.” That the prophets freely declared against the Jewish corruptions, against their

\* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 153.

idolatries and immoralities, and against their laying the chief stress on ritual observances, whilst they neglected the weightier matters of the law, is very true. And this is here, by an unpardonable disingenuity, represented as an inveighing against the Mosaic dispensation, as if they did not believe it to have been originally of divine institution: whereas it is to the last degree evident, that they all along suppose the law of Moses to have been instituted by God himself, and reprove the people and priests, not for their adherence to that law, but for their deviations from it, and neglect of the most important duties there enjoined.

This gentleman has given us a long list of *free-thinkers*; but there is none of them all of whom he seems to speak with greater complacency than Epicurus, though he owns that his system was a *System of Atheism*\*. And after having observed, that Epicurus was eminent for that *most divine of all virtues, friendship*, he says, *that we Christians ought to have a high veneration of him on this account, because even our holy religion itself does not any where particularly require of us this virtue.* The noble author of the *Characteristics* had made the same observation before him; and both the one and the other cite a passage from bishop Taylor, to shew that there is no word properly signifying *friendship* in the New Testament. Thus they have happily hit upon an instance in which the morality of the gospel is defective, and exceeded by that of Epicurus. But it ought to be considered, that friendship, when understood of a particular affection between two or more persons, is not always a virtue. It may in some cases inroach upon a nobler and more extensive benevolence, and may cause persons, and hath often done so, to sacrifice the most important duties to private affections. Or, where this is not the case, yet where friendship ariseth from a particular conformity of natural tempers and inclinations between some men and others, or, as Lord Shaftesbury expresses it, that peculiar relation which is formed by a consent and harmony of minds, it does not properly come under the prescription of a law, nor can be the matter of a general precept. But if it be understood of that benevolence which uniteth virtuous minds in the sacred bands of a special cordial affection, never was this more strongly recom-

\* Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 90. 129.

mended and enforced than in the gospel of Jesus. It requireth us to love and do good to all mankind, in which sense bishop Taylor rightly observes, in the very passage referred to, that *Christian charity is friendship to all the world*. And the last-mentioned noble writer asketh, *Can any friendship be so heroical as love to mankind\**? And, besides this general affection towards all men, the gospel requireth us to cultivate a still nearer, stronger, and more intimate affection towards good men, whom it representeth as obliged to *love one another with a pure heart fervently*. Lord Shaftesbury is pleased to mention St. Paul's saying, that *perhaps for a good man one would even dare to die*, and observes, that the *apostle is so far from founding any precept upon it, that he ushers it in with a very dubious peradventure*†. But it is to be supposed, his Lordship had not considered that noble passage of St. John, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he, our Lord Jesus Christ, laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*, 1 John iii. 16. Can friendship be carried to a nobler height, or be enforced by more engaging motives, or a more powerful example? Can it be pretended, that the *most divine of all virtues, friendship*, is not required of us in our *holy religion*, when we are there required, if properly called to it, to give so glorious a proof of our friendship to our Christian brethren, whom we are taught to regard as united to us by the most sacred ties?

We shall dismiss this *Discourse of Free-thinking* with observing, that as the author of it hath put Solomon into his list of free-thinkers, for asserting, as he pretends he did, the mortality of the soul, and denying a future state, though the contrary is manifest from what Solomon himself saith, Eccles. xii. 7. 14. so he takes that occasion to inform his reader, that the immortality of the soul was *first taught by the Egyptians*, and was an *invention of theirs*‡. Mr Toland had said the same thing before in his letters to Serena§; and this may help us to judge how far some of our boasted free-thinkers are from being friends to natural religion taken in its just extent.

Soon after this *Discourse of Free-thinking* appeared, the re-

\* Characterist. vol. ii. p. 229.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 102.

‡ Discourse of Free-thinking, p. 152.

§ Letter 2d.



verend Mr. Hoadley, now lord bishop of Winchester, published some very sensible *Queries addressed to the Authors of a late "Discourse of Free-thinking;"* in which the dishonest insinuations, false reasonings, and pernicious tendency of that treatise are laid open in a short and concise, but clear and convincing manner. There were several other ingenious pamphlets published to the same purpose: but none of them was so generally admired and applauded as the *Remarks on a late "Discourse of Free-thinking,"* by Phileleutherus Lipsiensis, i. e. Dr. Bentley. This learned writer hath so fully and effectually detected and exposed the great and inexcusable mistakes committed by the author of that discourse, his blunders and absurdities, his frequent wrong translations, and misunderstanding of the authors he quotes, or wilful perversions and misrepresentations of their sense, that it might, one should think, have discouraged him from appearing any more as a writer in this cause\*.

But such was this gentleman's zeal against Christianity, that, some years after, he thought fit to attack it in another way, which was more subtil and more dangerous. He published a *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, London, 1724, 8vo. as if his design had been to do real service to Christianity, by establishing it upon a sure and solid foundation. The scheme he lays down is this: that our Saviour and his apostles put the whole proof of Christianity solely and entirely upon the prophecies of the Old Testament: that if these proofs are valid, Christ-

\* There was a French translation of the "Discourse of Free-thinking," carried on under Mr. Collins's own eye, and printed at the Hague in 1714, though it bears London on the title page. In this translation several material alterations are made, and a different turn is given to several passages from what was in Mr. Collins's original English. This is plainly done with a view to evade the charges which had been brought against him by Dr. Bentley, under the character of "Phileleutherus Lipsiensis," some of which charges that bore very properly against Mr. Collins's book, as it was first published, will appear impertinent to those that judge only by this translation. But care is taken not to give the least notice of these alterations to the reader, upon whom it is made to pass for a faithful version of the original. All this is clearly shewn by the author of the French translation of "Dr. Bentley's Remarks on the Discourse of Free-thinking," which was printed at Amsterdam in 1738, under the title of "Friponerie Laique des pretendus Esprits forts d'Angleterre: The Lay-craft of the pretended Free-thinkers of England."

Christianity is established upon its true foundation; but if they are invalid, and the arguments brought from thence be not conclusive, and the prophecies cited from thence be not fulfilled, *Christianity has no just foundation, and is therefore false.* Accordingly he sets himself to shew, that the prophecies cited in the New Testament from the Old, in proof of Christianity, four or five of which he particularly considers, are only typical and allegorical proofs; and that allegorical proofs are no proofs, according to *scholastic rules*, i. e. as he plainly intends it, according to the rules of sound reason and common sense. He asserts, that the expectation of the Messiah did not obtain among the Jews, till a little before the time of our Saviour's appearing, when they were under the oppression of the Romans; and that the apostles put a new interpretation on the Jewish books, which was not agreeable to the obvious and literal meaning of those books, and was contrary to the sense of the Jewish nation: That Christianity deriveth all its authority from the Old Testament, and is wholly revealed there, not literally, but mystically and allegorically; and that therefore Christianity is the allegorical sense of the Old Testament, and is not improperly called *Mystical Judaism*; and that consequently the Old Testament is, properly speaking, the *sole true Canon of Christians*: That the allegorical reasoning is set up by St. Paul, and the other apostles, as the true and only reasoning proper to bring all men to the faith of

land." This gentleman, Mr. de la Chapelle, has made it appear, that Mr. Collins, and his Translator, who acted under his direction, have been guilty of palpable falsifications and frauds; which ill became one who had in that very book raised a loud outcry against the clergy for "corrupting and mangling of authors, and for pious frauds in the translation or publishing of books." And I cannot but observe on this occasion, what must have occurred to every one that has been much conversant in the deistical writers, that it would be hard to produce any persons whatsoever who are chargeable with more unfair and fraudulent management in their quotations, in curtailing, adding to, or altering, the passages they cite, or taking them out of their connexion, and making them speak directly contrary to the sentiments of the authors. It is well known that they affect frequently to quote Christian divines; but they seldom do it fairly, and often wilfully misrepresent and pervert their meaning. Many glaring instances of this sort might be produced out of the writings of the most eminent deistical authors, if any man should think it worth his while to make a collection to this purpose.

Christ; and all other methods of reasoning are wholly discarded. Thus it appeareth, that the evident design of this author's book is to shew, that the only foundation on which Christianity is built is false: that the first publishers of the gospel laid the whole support and credit of Christ's divine mission, and of the religion he taught, upon pretended Jewish prophecies, applied in a sense which had no foundation in the prophecies themselves, and contrary to the plain original meaning and intention of those prophecies; which the Jews had never understood nor applied in that sense, and which had nothing to support it but allegory; *i. e.* the mere fancy of him that so applies it. If we needed any farther proof of our author's intentions towards Christianity, it might be observed, that he represents Jesus and his apostles as having founded their religion on *prophecy*, in like manner as the several sects among the heathens did theirs on *divination*. And these prophets, he tells us, manifested their divine inspiration by the *discovery of lost goods, and telling of fortunes*\*. So that he makes Jesus and his apostles found their religion on the predictions of fortune-tellers and diviners, and those misapplied too; which plainly shews what a despicable idea this writer intended to convey of the Christian religion, and the blessed author of it.

Few books have made a greater noise than this did at its first publication. The turn given to the controversy had something in it that seemed new, and was managed with great art; and yet, when closely examined, it appears to be weak and trifling. The very fundamental principle of the author's whole system, *viz.* That the prophecies of the Old Testament are the sole foundation of Christianity, and the only proofs and evidences insisted upon by our Saviour and his apostles in confirmation of it, is absolutely false; as any one may know that can read the New Testament: for it is undeniable, that our blessed Lord often appealeth to his wonderful works, as manifest proofs that the Father had sent him; and the apostles in like manner frequently appealed to his miracles and resurrection, and to the miracles wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured forth in his name, as uncontested proofs of the divine authority of that scheme of religion which they published to the world.

\* Discourse on the Grounds, &c. of the Christian Religion, chap. vi.

With regard to the prophecies, the course of his reasoning really amounts to this: that because there are difficulties and obscurities attending some very few passages cited out of the Old Testament in the New, as having a reference to the times of the gospel; and we cannot well, at this distance, see the propriety of the application; therefore the whole of the New Testament is false; and the accounts given of our Saviour, his excellent discourses, the miracles he performed, and the illustrious attestations given to him from heaven, are of no force at all; and all the arguments drawn from thence are ineffectual and vain. It is in the same strain of reasoning that he concludes, that because four or five prophecies (for he produces no more) cited in the New Testament from the Old, seem not to relate to the gospel times in a literal, but in a secondary and typical, *i. e.* as he explains it, an allegorical sense, therefore none of the Old Testament prophecies can be applied directly and literally at all, or have any relation to our Saviour and the gospel dispensation. And because the modern Jews contest the application of some prophecies to the Messiah, which are applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, therefore the ancient Jews allowed none of those prophecies to be applied to the Messiah, which in the New Testament are applied to him: and yet the contrary is invincibly evident from their writings still extant, by which it appeareth, that most of the prophecies applied to our Saviour in the New Testament, and many others not there mentioned, were understood of the Messiah by the ancient Jews, as many of them still are by the most celebrated of the modern Jews themselves. And it was certainly a strange attempt in this author, to endeavour to prove, that the Jews had no notion or expectation of the Messiah, till a little before the times of our Saviour, when all their writers, with one consent, ancient and modern, who are the proper judges in such a case, agree, that there had been all along among them an hope and expectation of the Messiah, founded, as they universally believed, on the sacred writings. It may further let us see this writer's ingenuity, that because St. Paul makes use of an allegory in his epistle to the Galatians, though he there manifestly introduces it by way of illustration, and expressly declares to those to whom he writes, that these things are *allegorized*, therefore he layeth the whole stress of his arguments upon allegory as

the principal and only proof; and that he and the other apostles absolutely reject all other reasoning but the allegorical, which is no reasoning at all. And yet any one that ever read St. Paul's epistles must know, that he often makes use of reasoning and argument, and very close reasoning too. The last instance I shall produce of this author's extraordinary way of arguing is, that because the apostles and sacred writers of the New Testament acknowledge the authority of the Old, and draw proofs from thence, therefore the New Testament is of no authority at all, and the Old Testament is the sole Canon of Christians, *i. e.* because there is an harmony between the Old Testament and New, and because the former had foretold a glorious person who was to introduce a new and more perfect dispensation; therefore that new and more perfect dispensation is no new dispensation at all, but is absolutely and in all respects the same with that old and more imperfect one in which it was prefigured and foretold, and which was designed to prepare the way for it.

Having made these general observations, it will be proper to take notice of some of the answers that were made to this book; and here that which was written by Dr. Chandler, the lord bishop of Coventry and Litchfield, deserves special notice. It was published in 1725, and is intitled *A Defence of Christianity, from the Prophecies of the Old Testament*. This is a very learned and elaborate performance, and executed with great judgment. In it the bishop first sets himself to shew, that there was a general expectation of the Messiah at the time when our Saviour appeared; and he traces this expectation from that time to the very age of the prophets themselves. He then proceeds to shew, that to support this expectation there were express literal prophecies, that truly concern the Messiah, of which he produces twelve, which he particularly considers; and he proves with great evidence, that they were applied by the ancient Jews to the Messiah, and that it appeareth from the prophecies themselves, that they could not be applied to any other. He then goes on to shew, that, besides these, there were typical prophecies to the same effect, and which were intended to be applied to the Messiah. The author of the *Grounds*, &c. had every where represented typical prophecies, as signifying no more than that they were afterwards applied in an allegorical sense, and had asserted that

that there appear not the least traces of a typical intention in the writers of the Old Testament, or any other Jews of those times. In opposition to which, the bishop plainly proves, from the writings of the prophets themselves, that they were wont to prophesy by types, and to speak of themselves or others as types of other persons and people, on purpose to foretel what should be done by or to single persons or nations hereafter; of which he gives several instances: That therefore typical actions and typical discourses made part of the prophetic language, and were understood by the people to carry a reference to something future. And consequently, if the prophets speak of the Messiah in their own persons, or of other persons as types of him, there is nothing in this but what is agreeable to the known prophetic language. He makes it appear, that the prophets themselves understood some of those prophecies as typical of the Messiah, and, at the time of delivering those prophecies, gave intimations that they were thus to be referred: That accordingly the Jews acknowledge, that there were types in the Old Testament, and particularly that there were types of the Messiah; and that both the ancient and modern Jews understand many texts of the Messiah as the Christians do, which are plainly typical; and he shews, that there were good reasons for covering some of the events relating to the Messiah under the veil of types, which were not to be fully explained till the age in which they were fulfilled.

He next proceeds to give a distinct account of the texts pretended by the author of the *Grounds* to be misapplied. He justly observes, that if the principal characters of the Messiah be evidently found in the Jewish scriptures, to the same intent for which they are cited by Christ and his apostles, it is unreasonable to quit a certain truth, because every individual circumstance is not equally clear; and it doth not plainly appear at this time how two or three authorities are to be applied to the Messiah. And that the expression *that it might be fulfilled*, on which the author layeth so great a stress, was sometimes designed by the Jews to mean no more than that something answered alike in both cases, or that there was a suitableness in the cause or circumstance of one event to the other: and he shews, that the same way of speaking continueth among the Jews to this day.

With regard to the allegorical way, he observes, that it was chiefly

chiefly in condescension to the Jewish Christians that St. Paul at all used it; but that nothing can be more false and disingenuous, than to pretend that he never used any other way of reasoning than this. Finally, he thinks it may be allowed, that, considering the illustrious attestations given to our Saviour, which plainly shewed that he was a teacher sent from God, his interpretation of the prophecies ought to be acquiesced in; since he wrought his miracles by the same spirit by which those prophecies were delivered; and he instances in several prophecies, the interpretation of which given by our Lord, though different from that of the **Jews**, was actually fulfilled and verified by the event.

There was another learned author of the same name with the bishop, Mr. (now Dr.) Samuel Chandler, who also distinguished himself on this occasion, in a book intitled, *A Vindication of the Christian Religion*, published in 1725, 8vo. In the former part of that work, he hath a discourse on the nature and use of miracles; in which, after having stated the true notion of a miracle, and given the characters that distinguish true miracles from false, he clearly vindicates the miracles of our Saviour, and shews, that as they were circumstanced, they were convincing proofs of his divine mission. The second part of the same book is particularly designed as an answer to the author of the *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*. After having shewn, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are not the only proofs of Christianity, and that it is very absurd to pretend, as that author had done, that the Old Testament is the sole canon of Christians, he clearly evinceth, that many of those prophecies had a farther reference than to the times when they were first delivered; and particularly, that they contain a description of a great and good person, to proceed from David, who, notwithstanding his sufferings, should be highly exalted, and under whom true religion and righteoufness should be more extensive than before; that these prophecies relate principally to a spiritual salvation and deliverance; and that the Jews in our Saviour's time, as appeareth from their most ancient writings, applied many of those prophecies to the Messiah. He next treats of the double sense of prophecies, which the author of the *Grounds* had ridiculed, and shews that there is no absurdity in supposing, that as some prophecies relate wholly to the Messiah, so others may relate partly to his time,  
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and partly to the times when they were first delivered: and that this double sense of the prophecies was originally intended, and was so understood by the Jews. He accounts for the particular places excepted against by the author of the *Grounds*, and observes, as the bishop had done, that the apostles sometimes quote passages from the Old Testament, not in a way of direct proof, but to illustrate the argument they are upon; and sometimes by way of accommodation, to signify a correspondence of events, and to describe things that happened in their own times, by expressions derived from the ancient prophetic writings. That as arguments *ad hominem* have been always allowed, so if there were some particular passages in the ancient prophets, which were applied by the Jews to the Messiah, the reference of which was not so natural and clear, the apostles were fully justifiable in applying them to Jesus Christ, in their reasonings with the Jews, as far as they did agree with his person and character; but that there are few instances of this kind; nor did the apostles make use of this way of argument, except to the Jews or Jewish profelytes; and even to them they did not put the chief stress on these things, but laid before them other solid and substantial proofs of Christianity. Finally, if the difficulties which attend the quotations out of the Old Testament were much greater than they really are, yet this would not affect the credit or truth of the Christian religion, which hath many so evidences to support it.

There were several other good answers published to the *Grounds*, &c. and which were so well executed, as to deserve that a particular account should be given of them, if my prescribed limits would allow. Among others, Dr. Bullock's sermons were very justly and highly esteemed, in which "the reasoning of Christ and his apostles in their defence of Christianity is considered. To which is prefixed, a preface, taking notice of the false representations of Christianity, and of the apostles' reasoning in defence of it, in a book intitled *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*," London, 8vo. 1725. Dr. Sykes also published an *Essay upon the Truth of the Christian Religion, wherein its real Foundation in the Old Testament is shewn, occasioned by the "Discourse of the Grounds,"* London, 8vo. 1725. In this book it is both clearly proved, that there are some direct prophecies relating to the Messiah in the  
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Old Testament, especially in the book of Daniel; and there are many good observations to shew, that the New Testament writers often quote passages by way of accommodation and allusion only; and that most of the texts produced as prophecies by the author of the *Grounds* are of this kind. To these may be added, an ingenious treatise, intitled, *The true Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, in Opposition to the false ones set forth in a late Book, intitled "The Grounds, &c."* London, 8vo, 1725. *Letters to the Author of the "Discourse of the Grounds," shewing, that Christianity is supported by Facts well attested; that the Words of Isaiah, Chap. vii. 14. in their literal Sense are a Prophecy of the Birth and Conception of the Messias; and that the Gospel-Application of several other Passages in the Old Testament is just,* by John Greene, 8vo, London, 1726. Mr. Whifton also published, *The literal Accomplishment of Scripture-Prophecies, being a full Answer to a late "Discourse of the Grounds, &c."* London, 8vo, 1724: and he afterwards published *A Supplement to the literal Accomplishment of the Scripture-Prophecies*, London, 8vo. 1725. It may be proper also to mention a book, which was occasioned by the *Grounds, &c.* though not directly in answer to it, intitled, *The Use and Intent of Prophecy in the several Ages of the Church*, by Dr. Thomas Sherlock, bishop of London. This is an excellent performance, in which a regular series of prophecy is deduced through the several ages from the beginning, and its great usefulness shewn. The various degrees of light are distinctly marked out, which were successively communicated in such a manner as to answer the great ends of religion, and the designs of Providence, till those great events to which they were intended to be subservient should receive their accomplishment. There was another valuable book, which, though not published till some years after, may be considered as peculiarly designed against the *Grounds, &c.* viz. *The Argument from Prophecy, in Proof that Jesus is the Messias, vindicated, in some Considerations on the Prophecies of the Old Testament, as the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, by Moses Lowman, London, 8vo, 1733. The last book I shall here take notice of, as published on this occasion, was *A Review of the Controversy between the Author of the "Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion" and his Adversaries*,

*aries, in a Letter to the Author, 8vo, 1726, by Mr. Thomas Jeffrey. This is drawn up in a clear and judicious manner, and was deservedly well esteemed.*

The author of the *Grounds, &c.* thought fit, in 1727, to publish a second book, which was to pass for a defence of his first, in answer to his several adversaries, and particularly to the bishop of *Litchfield*. It was intitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*. In this book he very slightly passeth over the chief things he ought to have proved, and on which in his former book he had laid the greatest stress. Instead of confirming what he had so positively asserted before, that the prophecies of the Old Testament were the only proof on which Christianity is founded, he only shews that they are part of the proof insisted on by our Saviour and his apostles, and most disingenuously supposes, that his adversaries would not allow them to be any proofs at all. He had affirmed with great confidence, that none of the ancient Jews ever understood any of those prophecies of the Messiah, which are applied to Christ in the New Testament: but the utmost that he now attempts to shew is, that some of those prophecies were not understood by the ancient Jews of the Messiah; and even for this he can give no other reason than that some of the modern Jews do not so apply them. He has nothing now to prove, that the Old Testament is the only canon of Christians, or that the allegorical sense is the only sense of prophecies intended by our Saviour and his apostles. And whereas his answerers had urged, that though most of the prophecies applied in the New Testament to our Lord Jesus Christ were literally fulfilled in him, yet some particular passages might be used only in a way of illustration and accommodation, and not as direct proofs; he sets himself, as his manner is, with a mighty pomp of quotations, to shew the absurdity of supposing, that the apostles' method of citing prophecies was nothing but a mere accommodation of phrases, as if his adversaries had held, that all the passages cited in the New Testament from the Old were applied only by way of accommodation, which not one of them ever asserted. He puts on an appearance of answering what the bishop had alledged concerning the general and constant tradition, which had obtained among the Jews with regard to the Messiah; and he considers the twelve prophecies that learned writer had produced

duced, as literally fulfilled in the Messiah. But any one that will take the pains to compare what he hath here offered with the book he pretends to answer, will find how little he has been able to say, that is really to the purpose, and how far he has been from invalidating the proofs which had been brought. He often slips over the most material things that had been urged, and, as the bishop afterwards complained, takes no more notice of them than if he had not read them. If he can but find a single passage in any Jewish or Christian writer, though but a modern one, and contrary to the general consent of interpreters, this is laid hold on to set aside the bishop's interpretation, and to shew that the Jews did not generally understand a prophecy of the Messiah, or apply it to him, though clear evidence had been produced that they so applied it.

But there is no part of the *Literal Scheme, &c.* which the author has so much laboured, as that where he hath collected together all that he could meet with against the antiquity and authority of the book of Daniel, and the prophecies contained there. This occasioned a second answer from the learned bishop, intitled, *A Vindication of the Defence of Christianity from the Prophecies of the Old Testament*, published in 1728, in which he hath largely and very solidly vindicated the antiquity and authority of the book of Daniel, and the application of the prophecies there contained to the Messiah, against the author's objections: and hath also fully obviated whatsoever he had farther advanced against the antiquity and universality of the tradition and expectation among the Jews concerning the Messiah. The learned Dr. Rogers had before this published his very valuable sermons, on the *Necessity of divine Revelation, and the Truth of the Christian Religion*. "To which is prefixed a preface, with some remarks on a late book, intitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*," London, 1727, 8vo. Soon after which, there came out an ingenious pamphlet, intitled, *The true Grounds of the Expectation of the Messiah*, in two letters by *Philaletes*, London, 1727, said to be written by Dr. Sykes. Dr. Bullock also appeared again to great advantage in this controversy, in a treatise intitled, *The Reasoning of Christ and his Apostles vindicated*, in two parts. 1. *A Defence of the Argument from Miracles, proving the Argument from Prophecy not necessary to a rational Defence of our Religion.*

gion. 2. *A Defence of the Argument from Prophecy, proving the Christian Scheme to have a rational Foundation upon the Prophecies of the Old Testament*, in answer to a book intitled *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*, London, 1728, 8vo. In this book, Dr. Bullock finds great fault with our author's way of managing the argument: he observes, that he has not only "raked together the unguarded expressions of ingenious men, but by altering, adding to, and curtailing passages referred to, and by other disingenuous methods unbecoming a man of honour and sincerity, wresteth them to purposes apparently contrary to their true import." And yet no man had raised a louder outcry against the clergy, for abusing, corrupting, and mangling of authors to serve their own purposes, than this gentleman had done in his *Discourse of Free-thinking*. The bishop, in his *Vindication*, makes the same complaint against him; so does Dr. Samuel Chandler, who published, on this occasion, a judicious *Vindication of the Antiquity and Authority of Daniel's Prophecies, and their Application to Jesus Christ*: in answer to the objections of the author of the *Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered*, London, 1728, 8vo. About the same time was published, *Christianity the Perfection of all Religion, natural and revealed; wherein some of the principal Prophecies relating to the Messiah in the Old Testament are shewn to belong to him in the literal Sense, in Opposition to the Attempts of the Literal Scheme, &c.* by Thomas Jeffreys, London, 1728. I shall conclude this letter with observing, that this attack against Christianity, though carried on with great art as well as malice, produced this advantage, that it gave occasion to a full and accurate examination into the nature, design, and extent of many of the Old Testament prophecies, and to the placing some difficult passages in a clearer light.

## L E T T E R VIII.

*Mr. Woolston's Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour— Under pretence of standing up for the allegorical Sense of Scripture, he endeavours absolutely to destroy the Truth of the Facts recorded in the Gospels—His disingenuous Representation of the Sense of the Fathers on this Head, and his false Quotations—He charges the Accounts given of Christ's Miracles as absurd, false, and incredible—His gross and profane Buffoonry, and base Reflections on the Character of our Saviour; and yet he pretends a Zeal for his Honour and Messiahship—A Specimen of his way of Reasoning with regard to several of Christ's Miracles, and his Resurrection—Many good Answers published against him.*

SIR,

I HAVE already taken notice of several attempts, which were manifestly intended to subvert the truth and divine authority of our holy religion. The last that was mentioned was, that of the author of the *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, who, under pretence of setting Christianity on a sure and solid foundation, had endeavoured to shew that it hath no foundation at all; that it is founded wholly on the Old Testament prophecies, taken not in a literal, but merely in an allegorical, *i. e.* as he plainly designed it, in a false sense, contrary to the original intention of the prophecies themselves. In opposition to him it was clearly shewn, that many of the Old Testament prophecies are justly applied to our Saviour in their proper and literal sense. Besides which it was urged, that there were other solid proofs of Christianity, particularly that of our Saviour's miracles, and his resurrection from the dead; and the illustrious attestations given to him from heaven were evident proofs of his divine mission. And now, under pretence of acting the part of a moderator in this controversy, a new antagonist arose, Mr. Woolston, who endeavoured to allegorize away the miracles of our Saviour, as Mr. Collins had done the prophecies. This he first attempted in a pamphlet, intitled, *A Moderator between an*  
*Infidel*

*Infidel and an Apostate*; and in two *Supplements* to it: and afterwards more largely in six Discourses on the miracles of our Saviour, which were successively published at different times, in the years 1727, 1728, and 1729: the design of all which is to shew, that the accounts of the great facts recorded in the gospels are to be understood wholly in a mystical and allegorical sense; and that, taken in the literal and historical sense, they are false, absurd, and fictitious. This attempt he hath carried on with greater rudeness and insolence than any of those that appeared before him. The Earl of Shaftesbury, even where he unhappily sets up ridicule as the test and criterion of truth, expresseth his disapprobation of *scurrilous buffoonry, gross raillery, and an illiberal kind of wit*. And if there ever was any performance to which these characters might be justly applied, it is this of Mr. Woolston. The same noble writer observes, that to *manage a debate so as to offend the public ear, is to be wanting in that respect that is due to the society* — and that *what is contrary to good breeding is, in this respect, as contrary to liberty*. If we are to judge of Mr. Woolston's writings by this rule, they are as inconsistent with a just liberty, as they certainly are with good breeding and decency.

There are two ways by which he endeavours to answer the design he hath in view. The one is, by shewing that the literal sense of our Saviour's miracles is denied by the most ancient and venerable writers of the Christian church: the other is, by shewing the absurdity of the accounts given in the gospels, taken in the literal sense. With regard to the first of these, he hath with great pomp produced many testimonies of the fathers, for whom he professeth the profoundest veneration; and, by a strange dissimilarity, endeavoureth to represent them as absolutely denying the facts themselves related in the gospel; because, according to a custom which then obtained, they added to the literal, a spiritual and allegorical sense, and took occasion from thence to make pious allusions. He pretendeth, that if we will adhere to the fathers, *the gospel is in no sort a literal story*; and that *the history of Jesus's life is only an emblematical representation of his spiritual life in the souls of men*. But it is certain, and was evidently proved by his learned answerers, that in giving the allegorical and mystical sense, the fathers first supposed the literal

sense, and the historical truth of the facts, and upon them built their allegorical interpretations. It is acknowledged, 'that in these they often exceeded just bounds, and too much indulged the vagaries of a pious fancy: but to pretend, that they intended to deny that the facts recorded by the evangelists were really done, is one of the most confident impositions that were ever put upon mankind; and it is not to be doubted, but the author himself was sensible of this. Many glaring instances of unfairness and dissingenuity in his quotations from the fathers were plainly proved upon him. It was shewn, that he hath quoted books generally allowed to be spurious, as the genuine works of the fathers; and hath, by false translations and injurious interpolations, and foisting in of words, done all that was in his power to pervert the true sense of the authors he quotes; and that sometimes he interprets them in a manner directly contrary to their own declared sense, in the very passages he appeals to, as would have appeared, if he had fairly produced the whole passage.

It is not to be wondered at, that an author who was capable of such a conduct should stick at no methods to expose and misrepresent the accounts given by the evangelists of our Saviour's miracles. Under pretence of shewing the absurdity of the literal and historical sense of the facts recorded in the gospels, he hath given himself an unrestrained licence in invective and abuse. The books of the evangelists, and the facts there related, he hath treated in a strain of low and coarse buffoonry, and with an insolence and scurrility that is hardly to be paralleled. He asserts, that they are full of *improbabilities, incredibilities, and gross absurdities*: that they are like *Gulliverian tales of persons and things, that out of the romance never had a being: that neither the fathers, nor the apostles, nor Jesus himself, meant that his miracles should be taken in the literal, but in the mystical and parabolical sense*. And he expressly declares, that *if Jesus's miracles, literally taken, will not abide the test of sense and reason, they must be rejected, and Jesus's authority along with them\**. He casteth several reflections on our blessed Lord, so base and scurrilous, that they cannot but be extremely offensive to a Christian ear; and which even sober heathens, many of whom regarded

\* Discourse IV. p. 16.

him as a person of great wisdom and virtue, would have been ashamed of; and yet this author charges the bishop of London with *ignorance* or *malice*, in representing him as a *writer in favour of infidelity*. He declares, that he is the *farthest of any man from being engaged in the cause of infidels or deists*: and that he *writes not for the service of infidelity, which has no place in his heart, but for the honour of the holy Jesus, and in defence of Christianity*. The like declarations he frequently repeateth. He ends his fourth discourse on our Saviour's miracles with avowing, that his design in these his discourses is *the advancement of the truth and of the Messiahship of the holy Jesus, to whom be glory for ever, Amen*. He concludes his sixth discourse in the same manner; and expresses himself in his first and second Defence to the like purpose. Any one that compares these declarations with the whole strain of his discourses, will be apt to entertain the worst opinion imaginable of the writer's *sincerity*; and the most extensive charity will scarce be able to acquit him from the most gross and shocking prevarication.

But not to insist farther on this, one would have expected, that, after all the clamours he hath raised against the evangelical accounts of our Saviour's miracles, he should have had some formidable objections to produce; and yet, when stripped of the ridiculous turn he hath given them, they are, except some few difficulties, which are far from being new, and have been solidly answered, contemptibly vain and trifling. It is an objection he frequently repeats against what we are told concerning our Saviour's curing the diseased, the blind, the lame, &c. that the evangelists have not given us an exact account of the nature and symptoms of their distempers, as physicians and surgeons would have done, that we might know whether the cure was supernatural. And if they had done this, it would, no doubt, have been improved as a strong presumption of art and contrivance in the relaters, and as no way consistent with that honest, artless simplicity of narration, for which the evangelists are so remarkable. With regard to the cure of the man that was born blind, he finds fault that our Saviour did not cure him with a word speaking, which he says would have been a great and real miracle; and if he had done so, as he did in several other cases, this writer would have been as far from believing it as before. He will



have it, that, under pretence of anointing the blind man's eyes with clay and spittle, Jesus made use of a sovereign balsam which wrought the cure; and supposes, in direct contradiction to the whole story, that his blindness was only a slight disorder of the eyes, which was wearing away with age, and that therefore the restoring him to his sight was no miracle at all, though the man himself, his parents, and friends that had known him all along, and the chief priests and pharisees, who made a strict inquiry into the case, could not help acknowledging that it was a very great one. Our Saviour's discovering to the Samaritan woman the secrets of her past life, which convinced her of his being a prophet, and from whence he took occasion to give her the most excellent instructions concerning the nature of true religion, passes with this writer for the trick of a *fortune-teller*. And whereas it appeareth from the account given by the evangelist, that the Samaritans looked for the Messiah under the idea of a divine teacher, and the *Saviour of the world*, he represents it as if they expected the Messiah, not as a *prince* or a *prophet*, but a *conjurer* only. Several other instances might be produced, in which he addeth or varieth circumstances, and altereth the story as recorded by the evangelists, that he may take occasion to place it in a ridiculous light.

It is a remarkable concession which is made by him in the beginning of his fifth Discourse, that "it will be granted on all hands, that the restoring a person indisputably dead to life is a stupendous miracle; and that two or three such miracles, well-attested and credibly reported, are enough to conciliate the belief, that the author of them was a divine agent, and vested with the power of God\*." Three miracles of this kind are recorded in the gospel to have been wrought by Jesus; *viz.* his raising Jairus's daughter, the widow's son at Naim, and Lazarus. And what has our author to object against these accounts? He objects in general against them all, that the persons raised ought to have been magistrates or persons of eminence. But the raising such persons would not have been so agreeable to the rest of our Saviour's conduct and character, who shunned what might have the appearance of ostentation, or be looked upon as an attempt to make an interest with the great. He farther objects, that the

\* Discourse V. p. 3.

persons that were raised should have told what they had seen and done in the separate state. And if the evangelists had been romantic writers that wanted to amuse their readers with strange stories, they might probably have inserted some things of this kind into their accounts: but they confined themselves to the plain facts, as far as they knew them, which they have related with the greatest simplicity. He objects particularly against the story of raising Jairus's daughter, because she was but *a girl of twelve years old*; as if the raising one of that age was not as great a miracle as if she had been twenty. He next pretends that she was only *in a fit*; though all the persons about her, and her nearest relations, were satisfied that she was dead, and were making the usual preparations for her funeral. It is enough with him, to discredit the story of raising the widow's son at Naim from the dead, that he was not a person of importance, but a youth, and the son of a poor woman: and he has with great sagacity discovered, that Jesus's accidental meeting the corpse, and touching the bier, is a plain proof that it was all a contrivance between him and the young man. (To mention such objections is to confute them.) But perhaps he hath stronger ones to produce against the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, which he pronounceth to be such a *texture of folly and fraud, as is not to be equalled in all romantic history*: and yet the principal objection he hath to offer is no more than this, that three of the evangelists have not mentioned it. But no argument can be drawn against the truth of the fact from their silence; since it is evident that they never designed or pretended to record all the remarkable miracles which our Saviour wrought; and St. John, who was an eye-witness, and who chiefly taketh notice of the things which the others had omitted, hath given us a very distinct and particular account of it. Among the circumstances which Mr. Woolston looks upon to be sufficient to set aside that story, one is, that we are told, *Jesus wept*. This was a sign of his great humanity, and the goodness of his temper; but our author thinks a *stoical apathy* would have become him better. Another is, that Jesus called to Lazarus with a *loud voice to come forth*; which was certainly very proper, that all who were present might attend and observe. And what is very odd, he makes Lazarus's being *bound in grave cloaths*, and having his *head bound about with a napkin*, to be a very suspicious

sign that he had not been really dead; and very wisely has found out, that Lazarus by a concert with Jesus, who was at a considerable distance when it happened, contrived to be buried, and lie in the grave four days, that Jesus might have the honour of seeming to raise him up from the dead. And because the Jews took counsel to kill Jesus, and he withdrew for a while from their rage, this is produced as a proof, that the Jews knew he was guilty of a fraud, and that he himself was conscious of it; whereas it appears from the whole account, that their taking counsel to put him to death was owing to their being sensible of the greatness of the miracle, and that it was too evident to be denied, and was likely to draw the people after him.

The objections which he makes in the person of a Jewish rabbi, against the evangelical story of our Lord's resurrection, which he declareth to be a *complication of absurdities, incoherences, and contradictions*, are equally frivolous. He insinuates, that the guards set by the Roman governor, at the desire of the chief priests, to watch the body of Jesus, suffered themselves to be bribed or intoxicated by the disciples; in which he is more quick-sighted than the chief priests and pharisees, whom it more nearly concerned, who, it is plain, suspected no such thing; in which case, instead of excusing, they would have endeavoured to get them severely punished. But what he seems to lay the principal stress upon is, a supposed covenant between the chief priests and Jesus's disciples, that the seal with which the stone of the door of the sepulchre was sealed should not be broken, till the three days were entirely past: and that therefore the rolling away the stone from the sepulchre, and breaking the seal before the three days were ended, was a breach of that covenant, and a proof of an imposture. A most extraordinary conceit this! as if the rulers of the Jews would have troubled themselves to enter into a concert with Jesus's disciples, whom they hated and despised, and who at that time had hid themselves for fear of them, and were fled; or as if such a covenant could bind our Lord from rising when he judged fittest. As to that part of the objection which supposes, that he ought to have lain in the grave, according to his own prediction, three whole days and nights, it proceeds from a real or affected ignorance of the Jewish phraseology. This is a modern objection. The ancient enemies of Christianity did not

not pretend that Jesus rose before the time prefixed: for they very well knew that, according to a way of speaking usual among the Jews and other nations, his rising again on any part of the third day was sufficient to answer the prediction. This matter was set in a clear light in *The Trial of the Witnesses*: yet the objection was again repeated by the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*; and was so fully exposed by the learned answerers, that one would hope we shall hear no more of it\*.

Mr. Woolston makes it also a great objection against the truth of Jesus's resurrection, that he did not shew himself after his death to the chief-priests and rulers of the Jews. And indeed there is no objection with which the deistical writers have made a greater noise than this. It is urged particularly by the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*; but, above all, Mr. Chubb has insisted upon it at large, and with great confidence, in his posthumous works, vol. i. p. 337, & seq. And yet good reasons may be assigned, why it was not proper that it should be so. Considering the cruel and inveterate malice they had shewn against Jesus, and the power of their prejudices, there is no likelihood of their submitting to the evidence. They had attributed his miracles to the power of the devil; and his raising Lazarus from the dead, of which they had full information, only put them upon attempting to destroy him. Instead of being wrought upon by the testimony of the soldiers, they endeavoured to stifle it. And if Jesus had shewn himself to them after his passion, and they had pretended it was a spectre or a delusion, and had still refused to acknowledge him after this, it would have been insisted upon as a strong presumption against the reality of his resurrection. But let us suppose that Jesus had not only appeared to them after his resurrection, but that they themselves had acknowledged the truth of his resurrection and ascension, and had owned him for their Messiah, and brought the body of the Jewish nation into it; can it be imagined that they who now make that objection would have been satisfied? It may rather be supposed, that those great men's coming into it would have been represented as a proof that all was artifice and imposture; and that the

\* See the Evidence of the Resurrection cleared, p. 64, &c. and Mr. Chandler's Witnesses of the Resurrection re-examined, p. 14—19.

design was to spirit up the people against the Roman government, and carry on some political scheme, under pretence of restoring the kingdom to Israel. The whole would have been treated as a national Jewish affair, a thing concerted between the chief priests and the disciples; and there would have been a greater clamour raised against it, than there is now: I am persuaded that the evidence which was actually given of Christ's resurrection by the apostles and disciples of Christ, in opposition to their own prejudices, and to the authority and power of the Jewish chief priests and rulers, and notwithstanding the persecutions to which their testimony to it exposed them, was much more convincing and less exceptionable than it would have been, if they had had the favour and countenance of the chiefs of the Jewish nation, or of those persons who were of the greatest interest and authority among them.

What has been mentioned may serve for a specimen of this writer's objections against the accounts of our Saviour's miracles recorded in the evangelists: and he might by the same way of management, by arbitrary suppositions, and adding or altering circumstances as he judged proper, have proved the most authentic accounts in the Greek or Roman history to be false and incredible. He might at the same rate of arguing have undertaken to prove, that there was no such person as Jesus Christ, or his apostles, or that they were only allegorical persons, and that Christianity was never planted or propagated in the world at all,

This extraordinary writer thought fit to begin his second Discourse on our Saviour's miracles, with boasting, that none of the clergy had published their exceptions against what he had offered in his first; and that this shewed that his cause was just, and his arguments and authorities unanswerable. But he did not continue long unanswered: many learned adversaries soon appeared against him: but they were far from imitating him in his low and scurrilous way of treating the subject. They shewed themselves as much superior in the temper, calmness, and solid and serious manner of treating the argument, as in the goodness of their cause. They considered even his most trifling objections; and whatever things he had urged, that had any real or seeming difficulty in them (and some such things must be expected in ancient writings, which relate to times and customs different from  
ours,

ours, and especially with regard to facts of an extraordinary nature), were coolly examined, and fully obviated.

The late worthy bishop of London, Dr. Gibson, published on this occasion an excellent pastoral letter, written, as all his are, with great clearness and strength. The learned and ingenious Dr. Zachary Pearce, now Lord Bishop of Rochester, published *The Miracles of Jesus Vindicated*, in four parts, which came out at different times in the year 1729, and were deservedly much esteemed. But the largest answer was that by Dr. Smallbrook, Lord Bishop of St. David's, in two volumes, 8vo. This learned work is intitled, *A Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles; in which Mr. Woolston's Discourses on them are particularly examined; his pretended Authority of the Fathers against the Truth of the literal Sense are set in a just Light; and his Objections, in point of Reason, answered*—London, 1729. There were other good answers published, which also took in the whole of Mr. Woolston's Discourses: such were Mr. Ray's *Vindication of our Saviour's Miracles*, in two parts, the first published in 1727, the second in 1729; and Mr. Stevenson's *Conference on the Miracles of our Saviour*, published in 1730, an ingenious and solid performance. Besides which there were several excellent pamphlets, that were designed to vindicate some particular miracles against Mr. Woolston's exceptions. Such were Mr. Atkinson's *Vindication of the literal Sense of three Miracles of Christ—his turning Water into Wine—his whipping the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple—and his exorcising the Devils out of two Men—against Mr. Woolston's Objections, in his first and second Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour; in three Letters to a Friend*, London, 8vo, 1729. Dr. Harris's two sermons on the *Reasonableness of believing in Christ, and the Unreasonableness of Infidelity: with an Appendix, containing brief Remarks upon the case of Lazarus; relating to Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse of Miracles*, London, 8vo, 1729. That discourse of Mr. Woolston was also animadverted upon by Mr. Simon Brown, in a treatise written with great smartness and spirit, intitled, *A fit Rebuke to a ludicrous Infidel, in some Remarks on Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour: with a Preface concerning the Prosecution of such Writers by the Civil Power*, London,

London, 8vo. 1732. The following tracts also deserve special notice, as being written with great clearness and judgment. *A Vindication of three of our blessed Saviour's Miracles, in Answer to the Objections of Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour*, by Nathaniel Lardner, now Dr. Lardner, London, 1729. *A Defence of the Scripture History, as far as it concerns the Resurrection of Jairus's Daughter, the Widow's Son at Naim, and Lazarus; in Answer to Mr. Woolston's fifth Discourse*, London, 1729. This is said to have been written by Dr. Henry, who afterwards published *A Discourse on our Saviour's miraculous Power of Healing; in which the six Cases excepted against by Mr. Woolston are considered; being a Continuation of the Defence of Scripture History*, London, 1730. And as Mr. Woolston had bent his efforts with a particular virulence against the resurrection of our blessed Lord, this was fully and distinctly considered, especially in a pamphlet written by Dr. Sherlock, Lord Bishop of London, intitled, *The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*, London, 1729, which has been very justly admired for the polite and uncommon turn, as well as the judicious way of treating the subject. There were also published on the same occasion, *An Answer to the Jewish Rabbi's two Letters against Christ's Resurrection, and his raising Lazarus from the dead; with some Observations on Mr. Woolston's own Reflections on our Saviour's conduct*, London, 1729. *An impartial Examination and full Confutation of the Arguments brought by Mr. Woolston's pretended Rabbi against the Truth of our Saviour's Resurrection*, London, 8vo, 1730. And two Discourses by Dr. Wade: the first, *An Appeal to the Miracles of Jesus Christ for his Messiahship*: the second, *A Demonstration of the Truth and Certainty of his Resurrection from the dead*, London, 8vo, 1729. Among the writers that appeared against Mr. Woolston, Mr. Joseph Hallet ought not to be forgotten, on the account of his judicious *Discourse of the Reality, Kinds, and Numbers of our Saviour's Miracles, occasioned by Mr. Woolston's six Discourses*: this was published in the second volume of his notes and discourses, 8vo, 1732. The last I shall mention is Mr. Stackhouse, who published *A fair State of the Controversy between Mr. Woolston and his Adversaries*, London, 8vo.

8vo. 1730: in which he hath given a very clear account of Mr. Woolston's objections, and the answers that were returned by those who had written against him.

Mr. Woolston published what he called, *A Defence of his Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour, against the Bishop of London and St. David's, and his other Adversaries*, in two pamphlets: the first was published, London, 1729; the second in 1730. These are very trifling performances, in which there is a continued strain of low drollery, but little that has a shew of reason and argument, in answer to what had been strongly urged against him. He has scarce attempted to take notice of the instances which had been brought to shew his great dishonesty in his quotations, and his gross falsifications of the fathers and ancient writers. This seems to have given him very little disturbance, though if he had any regard to his own reputation, it highly concerned him to clear himself, if he had been able to do it, from so heavy a charge.

But I believe you will be of opinion, that I have dwelt long enough upon such an author, though he himself boasts of *cutting out such a piece of work for our Boylean lectures, as shall hold them tug* (as he politely expresseth it), *so long as the ministry of the letter, and a hireling priesthood last* \*.

\* See his fifth Discourse on Miracles, p. 65, 66.



## L E T T E R IX.

*The present Age a happy Time of Liberty, but that Liberty greatly abused—An Account of Dr. Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation—He pretends a great Regard for the Christian Religion, yet uses his utmost Efforts to discard all Revelation, in general, as entirely uselefs and needlefs; and particularly sets himself to expose the Revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament—The high Encomiums he bestows on the Religion of a Deist, and on his own Performance—Observations upon his Scheme—It is shewn to be absurd and inconsistent—What he offers concerning the absolute universal Clearness of the Law of Nature to all Mankind, contrary to plain undeniable Fact and Experience—His Scheme really less favourable to the Heathens than that of the Christian Divines—An Account of the Answers published against him.*

**I** BELIEVE, Sir, you will agree with me, that never had any nation a fuller enjoyment of liberty than we have had since the Revolution. What Tacitus celebrates as the felicity of the times of Trajan, "that men might think as they pleased, and speak as they thought," may be more justly applied to our own. *Rara temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quæ velis, et quæ sentias dicere licet*\*. The noble author of the *Characteristics* is pleased to mention it to the honour of the heathen world in ancient Greece and Rome, that "visionaries and enthusiasts were tolerated; and "on the other side, philosophy had as free a course, and was "permitted as a balance against superstition. Thus matters were "happily balanced: reason had fair play; learning and science "flourished †." It would be no hard matter to shew that this representation is not altogether just: for, not to mention the case of Socrates and others, it is capable of a clear proof, that though they might bear with the disputes among the several sects of philosophers in their schools, yet they would not suffer the established religion of the state to be called in question, and were ready to

\* Tacit. Hist. l. i. in præm.

† Characterist. vol. i. p. 18.

punish those that opposed it, of which they gave the most sanguinary proofs when Christianity appeared. But what his Lordship has said of those heathen times, the felicity of which he so much extols, is undoubtedly true of ours. Visionaries and enthusiasts are not persecuted, but tolerated: philosophy has a free course: reason has fair play: learning and science have greatly flourished. Nor can any age or country be mentioned, in which men have had a greater freedom of openly declaring their sentiments, either with regard to civil or religious matters. This is our privilege and our glory; but the greatest advantages are capable of being perverted through the corruption of mankind. Liberty, which, rightly improved, is the best friend to truth and to pure and undefiled religion, is often abused to a boundless licentiousness. Of this we have had many instances: but in nothing has it more remarkably appeared, than in the open repeated attempts that have been made against all revealed religion. It cannot be pretended, that the adversaries of Christianity have not been at liberty to produce their strongest objections against it. They have not only offered whatsoever they were able in a way of reason and argument, but they have in many instances given a loose to the most offensive ridicule and reproach: and if they have frequently thought fit to cover their attempts with a pretended regard for Christianity, we may safely affirm, that it has not been so much out of fear of punishment, as that under that disguise they might the better answer the end they had in view, and give religion a more deadly wound as pretended friends, than they could as avowed adversaries. This advantage however hath arisen from it, that it hath given occasion to many noble defences of Christianity, and to the clearing various difficulties, and placing the excellence and evidences of our holy religion in the strongest and most convincing light.

The attacks against Christianity, of which I have taken notice in my former letters, seemed for some time to have been carried on almost without intermission. Animated with a strange kind of zeal, the enemies of revelation were unwearied in their endeavours to subvert it. When repelled in one attempt, they were not discouraged, but renewed it in another form. Of this we now are going to have a fresh instance. Woolston's attempt was

so conducted as to raise a kind of horror and just indignation in all that had not utterly extinguished all remaining regard to the religion in which they were baptized. Such outrageous abuse, such undisguised reproach cast upon our blessed Saviour and his holy gospel, such coarse ridicule and contempt, though it did a great deal of mischief among men of empty and vicious minds, with whom scurrilous jest and gross buffoonry, especially when levelled against things sacred, passeth for wit and argument; yet was apt rather to create disgust in persons of any degree of taste or refinement. It was therefore judged necessary, that Christianity should be attacked in a more plausible way, which had a greater appearance of reasoning, and might be better fitted to take with persons of a more rational and philosophic turn. This seems to have been the design of Dr. Tindal's laboured performance, intitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation; or, the Gospel a Republication of the Law of Nature*; which was first published in 4to, London, 1730, and afterwards in 8vo. One would have been apt to expect from the title of this book, that he should have set himself to prove, that the gospel is perfectly agreeable to the law of nature; that it hath set the great principles of natural religion in the clearest light; and that it was designed to publish and confirm it anew, after it had been very much obscured and defaced through the corruption of mankind. And if so, this author, who every-where professeth such a high esteem for the genuine law and religion of nature, ought to have done all in his power to recommend the gospel-revelation to the esteem and veneration of mankind, and to have represented it as a great advantage to those that enjoy it, and a signal instance of the divine goodness: And what would induce one farther to think that this was his view, he expressly declareth, that Christianity is the *external*, as natural religion is the *internal revelation of the same unchangeable will of God*, and that they differ only in the manner of their being communicated: and he proposeth greatly to *advance the honour of external revelation*, by shewing *the perfect agreement there is between that and internal revelation*. He professeth to agree with bishop Chandler, that "Christianity itself, stripped of the additions that policy, mistake, and the circumstances of time have made to it, is a most holy religion; " and

“ and that all its doctrines plainly speak themselves to be the will  
 “ of an infinitely wise and good God\*.” Accordingly he hon-  
 noureth himself and his friends with the title of *Christian Deists*.

But whosoever closely and impartially examineth his book will find, that all this plausible appearance and pretended regard to Christianity is only intended as a cover to his real design, which was to set aside all revealed religion, and entirely to destroy the authority of the scriptures. Others have attacked particular parts of the Christian scheme, or of its proofs. But this writer has endeavoured to subvert the very foundations of it, by shewing, that there neither is nor can be any external revelation at all, distinct from what he calls *the internal revelation of the law of nature in the hearts of all mankind*: that such external revelation is absolutely needless and useless; that the original law and religion of nature is so perfect, that nothing can possibly be added to it by any subsequent external revelation whatsoever; nor can God himself lay any new commands upon us, or institute any positive precepts, additional to the immutable eternal law of nature, without the imputation of erecting an unreasonable tyranny over his creatures. And as the religion and law of nature is absolutely perfect, so it always was and is clear and obvious to all mankind, even to those of the meanest capacity: so clear that it is impossible to be rendered more plain to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it; that therefore all pretences to such revelation are only owing to enthusiasm or imposture; that reason and external revelation are inconsistent; and to be governed by the authority of such revelation is really to renounce our reason, and to give up our understandings to implicit faith: that this hath been the source of all the superstitions and corruptions which have prevailed among mankind: and that therefore the best thing that can be done for them is to engage them to throw off all regard to revelation, and to *adhere to the pure simple dictates of the light of nature*.

And as he thus endeavoureth to set aside all external supernatural revelation as needless and useless, and all pretences to it as vain and groundless; so he particularly setteth himself to expose the revelation contained in the holy scriptures of the Old

\* Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 382. edit. 8vo.

and New Testament. He attempteth to invalidate the original proofs on which the authority of that revelation is founded, and particularly that which is drawn from the miracles that attested it: and he also taketh pains to prove, that we cannot possibly have any assurance, that this revelation is transmitted to us in a manner which may be safely depended upon. He examineth the revelation itself, and endeavoureth to shew, that it is uncertain and obscure; that its precepts are delivered in a loose, general, undetermined manner, so as to be incapable of giving clear directions to the bulk of mankind; that the *keys of solution* necessary for understanding the scriptures, are what the people are wholly unacquainted with; that, far from being of use as a rule to direct men in faith and practice, the scriptures are only fit to perplex and misinform them; that they tend to give them very wrong and unworthy apprehensions of the Deity, and the duty they owe him; and that there are many things either commanded or approved there, which are apt to lead men astray in relation to the duties they owe to one another. He farther endeavoureth to shew, that there is a contrast and opposition between the parts of this revelation, particularly between the Old Testament and the New. And it may be said upon the whole, that he hath spared no pains to rake together whatsoever he thought might be capable of exposing the scriptures, or the Christian religion. He concludes his book with arguing against the Christian revelation, from its having not been universal in all times and places, and from the corruptions of Christians.

Whilst he thus useth his utmost endeavours to expose Christianity as a falsely-pretended revelation, and as not only needless and useless, but of pernicious influence to mankind; he hath taken care to make the most advantageous representation of that scheme of natural religion he would recommend, and to shew the great advantage the religion of the deists hath above that of the Christians. He sometimes speaks as if he thought the deists were infallibly guided, in making use of the reason God hath *given them, to distinguish religion from superstition, so that they are sure not to run into any errors of moment\**. On the other hand, he honours all those that are for positive precepts in religion with

\* Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 336. edit. 8vo.

the character of Demonists: and he represents divines in all ages, as, *for the most part, mortal enemies to the exercise of reason, and even below brutes.*

He ends his book as he had begun it, with a high panegyric upon his own performance: That by this attempt of his, "as nothing but rubbish is removed, so every thing is advanced which tends to promote the honour of God, and the happiness of human societies: That there is none who wish well to mankind, but must also wish his hypothesis to be true; and that there cannot be a greater proof of its truth, than that it is in all its parts so exactly calculated for the good of mankind, that either to add to it, or take from it, will be to their manifest prejudice: That it is a religion, as he hopes he has fully proved, founded upon such demonstrable principles, as are obvious to the meanest capacity, and most effectually prevents the growth both of scepticism and enthusiasm."

This may suffice to give a general idea of this boasted performance; but, if carefully examined, it will appear, that it is far from deserving the magnificent encomiums which he himself, and others who are favourers of the same cause, have so liberally bestowed upon it.

The scheme which this writer hath advanced, in order to shew that there is no place or need for extraordinary revelation, dependeth chiefly upon two principles. The one is, that the law or religion of nature, obligatory upon all mankind, was from the beginning absolutely perfect and immutable, so that nothing could ever be added to it by any subsequent revelation. The other is, that this original law or religion of nature, comprehending all that men were from the beginning obliged to know, believe, profess, and practise, always was and still is so absolutely clear to all mankind, that it cannot be made clearer to any man by any external revelation, than it is to all men without it.

As to the first, he argues, that because God is unchangeable and absolutely perfect, therefore the religion he gave to man from the beginning must have been unchangeable and absolutely perfect; since nothing can proceed from a God of infinite perfection but what is perfect; and that to suppose any subsequent addition to it, or alteration in it, is to suppose a change in God. But this will not answer the author's end, except he can prove

If so why write  
 already that he has?

that man is unchangeable too; and that the state of mankind must necessarily in all ages and seasons continue precisely the same that it was at the beginning of the world: For if there should be a change in the state and circumstances of mankind, *e. g.* from pure religion to superstition, or from a righteous and innocent to a guilty and corrupt state, God may see fit for excellent ends to lay new injunctions upon men, or make some farther discoveries of his will, suited to that alteration of circumstances. Nor would this shew that he was changeable, but that he was most wise and good: and it would be a strange thing to affirm, that there could not possibly be any farther significations or discoveries of the divine will ever made by God himself, or any other thing required by him of men, or any additional help or advantages ever offered to them, in any supposable state or circumstances of mankind, but what were afforded and made from the beginning of the creation. This is a most absurd scheme; and if such a one had been advanced by the advocates for revelation, plentiful ridicule would have been bestowed upon it.

And it is equally absurd to pretend, as this writer doth, that God cannot at any time, or in any circumstance of things, injoin positive precepts. If there be any external worship to be rendered to God at all (and this gentleman hath not thought fit openly to deny this), it would be the most unreasonable thing in the world to pretend, that he cannot institute or appoint what are the properest outward rites, or manner of performing that worship; especially since our author allows, that men themselves may appoint them: and to deny God the power which he alloweth to human magistrates in such a case, is abhorrent to the common sense of mankind; especially, considering that there is nothing in which men have more grossly erred, or as to which they stood in greater need of being properly directed, than in what relateth to religious worship. I would only farther observe, that this writer, in the whole dispute about positive precepts, always supposes *positive* and *arbitrary* precepts to be terms of the same signification: and by *arbitrary* he means things for which there is no reason at all. But this is a very unfair state of the case; for when we say God hath instituted positive precepts, though the matter of them be antecedently of an indifferent nature, it is still supposed there were wise reasons for injoining them, and that,

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when enjoined, they are designed to be subservient to things of a moral nature, and to help forward the great ends of all religion. And that the positive precepts required in the Christian religion are such, and of an excellent tendency, hath been often clearly shewn.

The other main principle of the author's scheme is, that that law or religion of nature, which he supposes to be absolutely perfect, always was and is so clear and obvious to all men, that there is not the least need or use of external revelation. This is what he hath greatly laboured; and if strong and confident assertions, frequently repeated, may pass for proofs, he hath fully proved it. This part of his scheme coincides with that of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, who had represented the five great principles, in which he makes religion to consist, to be common notions, inscribed by a divine hand in the minds of all men, and universally acknowledged in all ages and nations. In like manner the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* asserteth, that that religion, the perfection of which he so much extols, is *apparent to the whole world, to those of the meanest as well as highest capacity, and who are unable to read their mother tongue.* He expressly declareth, that God could *not more fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures than he hath done this way; no, not if he should miraculously convey the same ideas to all men\**. He frequently speaks, as if the principles and obligations of natural religion were so clear, that men could not possibly mistake them; that all men see them at first view; and that the actual knowledge of the law of nature is naturally necessary, and inseparable from rational nature; so that it is as impossible for any reasonable creature to be ignorant of it, as it is for animals to live without the pulse of the heart and arteries.

This scheme, though it has been mightily applauded, is contrary to evident fact and experience: It supposeth the law or religion of nature, in its important principles and obligations, to be necessarily known to all mankind, and to be so clear that they cannot mistake it; when nothing is more certain and undeniable, than that they have mistaken it in very important instances, and that some of its main principles have been very much per-

\* *Christianity as old as the Creation*, p. 22. edit. 8vo.

of which he says, p. 22.



verted and obscured. I shall not here repeat what was offered to this purpose in a former letter in my remarks on Lord Herbert's scheme, in which it is plainly proved, that men have fallen into a gross darkness with respect to some of those great principles in which that noble writer makes the true religion to consist; and that after all his efforts to the contrary, he hath found himself under a necessity of acknowledging it. The like acknowledgments the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* hath been obliged to make. He himself in several parts of his book, though in plain contradiction to his own scheme, representeth almost all mankind in all ages, excepting the *Free-thinking few*\*, as having had very unworthy apprehensions of God, and wrong notions of the religion and law of nature. And no small part of his book is employed in inveighing against that superstition which he supposeth to have generally prevailed among mankind at all times, and which in his opinion is worse than Atheism; and consequently it must be acknowledged, even according to his own representation of the case, that men had fallen from the right knowledge of the religion of nature into great darkness and corruption. Cicero was so sensible of this, that, speaking of *some small sparks of virtue implanted in us*, he complaineth, that they are *soon extinguished by corrupt customs and opinions, so that the light of nature no-where appears*†. From whence he infers the great necessity and usefulness of philosophy to direct and assist us; and certainly this will conclude much more strongly for the necessity and usefulness of a divine revelation, which would be much more advantageous, and more to be depended on.

The argument therefore which Dr. Tindal urgeth from the supposed universal clearness of the law of nature, to shew that there is no need or use for external revelation, falls to the ground. And indeed his way of arguing, if it proves any thing, equally proves, that all the writings of philosophers and moralists, all the instructions that have been ever given to mankind in matters of religion and morality, have been perfectly needless and of no use; and that consequently, all books which have been written

\* *Christianity as old as the Creation*, p. 149.

† *Tuscul. Quæst. lib. iii. in præm.*

The light of nature is gross darkness - which with the help of  
 Reason can dispel

on

on these subjects, the noblest in the world, and the best worth writing upon, must be discarded, as well as the scriptures: since all mankind have such a perfect knowledge of their duty, that they stand in no need of instruction or information. Yea, he sometimes represents it, as if instructing them by words tended only to mislead them from the knowledge of things. Thus, according to this goodly scheme, all men are to be left to what he calls the simple dictates of the light of nature, without any instruction at all: the certain consequence of which would be universal ignorance and barbarism. He often expresseth himself, as if he thought that all men have an equal knowledge of the law of nature; and indeed I do not see but that upon his scheme it must be so: yet at other times he supposeth the knowledge men have of it to be more or less clear according to the circumstances they are in: for he says, it is not necessary that all men *should have equal knowledge of it, but that all should have sufficient for the circumstances they are in\**; and talks of a man's *doing his best, according as his circumstances permit, to discover the will of God*; and of men's being *accepted, if they live up to their different degrees of light*. But though others may charitably make use of this way of speaking, it is hard to see how this writer can do it in consistency with his scheme; or how he can suppose any allowances to be made for involuntary errors: since according to his representation of the case, all errors in matters of religion or morals must be voluntary, in opposition to the clearest universal light. Though therefore he sets up for a mighty advocate for the heathen world, and blames the Christian divines for passing too severe a censure upon them, he himself must, if he be consistent, judge much more harshly of them than they: since his hypothesis quite destroys the plea with regard to the heathens, drawn from the great darkness and difficulties they laboured under; for he positively asserteth, that the law of nature is so clear, that *no well-meaning Gentile could be ignorant of it* †. He must therefore suppose all of them, who were involved in the general superstition and idolatry, which he himself acknowledgeth to be contrary to the law of nature, to have been destitute of that sincerity, which he maketh to be the only title to happiness, and to the favour of God.

\* Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 4. edit. 8vo.

† Ibid. p. 36.

It may not be improper to observe farther, that though he often speaks of the law of nature, as if it were a system of principles and rules fixed and unalterable, to which nothing could ever be added, and in which nothing could ever be altered (which rule and principles he supposes to be necessarily known to all mankind), yet at other times he expresses himself, as if he thought there were no fixed unchangeable principles and rules of morality at all. The goodness of actions is, according to him, to be wholly measured by their tendency; and this is to be judged by the circumstances a man is under, which circumstances he represents as *continually changing*\*. It appears from several passages, that, after all his magnificent talk of the perfection and immutability of the law of nature, all that he would have to be understood by it is only this, that it is the will of God that every man should act, according as the circumstances he is under point out his duty. This is the sole universal rule or standing law given to all mankind for their conduct, and by which they may know their duty in all cases whatsoever; as if it were sufficient to tell men, even the most illiterate, that they must act as the circumstances they are placed in do require, without any other farther direction. But surely any one that knows the world and mankind must be sensible, that if every man were to be left to himself, to find out what is good and fit for him to do, merely by what he apprehendeth to be most for his own benefit in the circumstances he is under, and to gratify his appetites and passions as far as he himself thinketh to be most for his own advantage and happiness, without any other direction or law to restrain or govern him, it would soon introduce a very loose morality. I cannot help looking upon it to be a strange way of thinking, to imagine that it would be better for every man to be left thus to form a scheme of religion and morals for himself, than to have his duty urged and enforced upon him, by plain and express precepts, in a revelation confirmed by the authority of God himself.

As this book made a great noise, many good answers were returned to it. A second *pastoral Letter* was published on this occasion by the late bishop of London, which, like his former, comprised a great deal in a small compass, and was very well

\* Christianity as old as the Creation, p. 16. 317, 318.

fitted to answer the end it was intended for, to be an antidote against the spreading infection of infidelity. Several other valuable treatises might be mentioned, such as, *The Argument set forth in a late Book intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation," reviewed and confuted in several Conferences*, by Dr. Thomas Burnet. Dr. Waterland's *Scripture Vindicated*; which was particularly designed to vindicate the holy Scripture, which this author had taken great pains to vilify and expose: A good account is here given of a great number of passages in the sacred writings, and his objections against them are fully obviated. Mr. Law's *Case of Reason, or Natural Religion, fairly and fully stated, in Answer to a Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation."* Mr. Jackson's *Remarks on a Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation."* Dr. Stebbing's *Discourse, concerning the Use and Advantage of the Gospel-Revelation, in which are obviated the principal Objections contained in a Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation,"* London, 8vo. 1731. The same learned and judicious writer published another excellent tract against Dr. Tindal, intitled, *A Defence of Dr. Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion, in Answer to the fourteenth Chapter of a Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation,"* London, 8vo. 1731. Mr. Balguy, the worthy author of a *Letter to a Deist*, of which some notice was taken before in the account of the Earl of Shaftesbury's writings, published on this occasion *A second Letter to a Deist, concerning a late Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation;" more particularly that Chapter which relates to Dr. Clarke*, London, 8vo. 1731. And, several years after, he published a very valuable tract, which was particularly intended to defend the mediatorial scheme, against the objections which Dr. Tindal had advanced, intitled, *An Essay on Redemption, being the second Part of Divine Rectitude*, London, 8vo. 1741. To these ought to be added, a piece which has been deservedly much esteemed, written by the ingenious Mr. Anthony Atkey, though without his name, intitled, *The main Argument of a late Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation," fairly stated and examined; or, a short View of the whole Controversy*, London, 8vo, 1733. Besides these and other tracts that were published on this occasion, there were some large

answers made to this book, of which I shall give a more particular account.

The first of them that I shall mention is intitled, *The Usefulness, Truth, and Excellency of the Christian Revelation, defended against the Objections contained in a late Book, intitled, "Christianity as old as the Creation,"* by James Foster, afterwards Dr. Foster, London, 8vo. 1731. This is generally and justly acknowledged to be an ingenious performance, and written with great clearness of thought and expression. It is divided into five chapters. The first is designed to shew the advantages of revelation in general, and particularly of the Christian: it is plainly proved, that whatever the power of reason may be supposed to be, if duly exercised and improved to the utmost, yet when the light of nature is darkened, and ignorance, idolatry, and superstition have overspread the world, which was undoubtedly the case when our Saviour appeared, an extraordinary revelation would be highly useful, and of great benefit to mankind. He then proceeds to consider what is the proper evidence of the truth and divinity of any particular revelation; and how those to whom it is given may be satisfied that it really came from God; and here it is shewn, that miracles, when considered in conjunction with the good tendency and excellence of the doctrines, furnish a proper and sufficient evidence. In the second chapter, he vindicates the conduct of God's providence in not making the Christian religion universally known to all nations, and in all times and ages; and proves, that this is analogous to the general course of providence both in the natural and moral world, and that it is consistent with the divine perfections, and consequently with the notion of its being a divine revelation. In the third chapter, which is the largest in the whole book, it is shewn, that we have a sufficient probability, even at this distance, of the authenticity, credibility, and purity of the books of the New Testament; and that the common people are able to judge of the truth and uncorruptedness of a traditional religion: and a good answer is returned to the arguments drawn from the change of languages, the different use of words, and the style and phrase of scripture, to prove it an obscure, perplexed, and uncertain rule. The fourth chapter contains a general defence of positive commands, which Dr. Tindal had urged as alone "sufficient to make all  
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" things else, that can be said in support of any revelation, totally " ineffectual." It is proved, that they are not repugnant to reason, nor subversive of moral obligation, nor inconsistent with the wisdom, justice, and goodness of God: and that instituted religion is not superstition, and, if rightly understood, has no more a tendency to superstition, than natural religion itself. And the fifth contains a particular vindication of the peculiar positive institutions of Christianity; in which it is shewn, that they are of excellent use for begetting and strengthening good moral habits, and for exciting and engaging men to a more diligent practice of moral duties.

Another answer, which particularly engaged the attention of the public, was that published by Dr. John Conybeare, rector of Exeter College, Oxford, late lord bishop of Bristol, viz. *A Defence of Revealed Religion, against the Exceptions of a late Writer, in his Book intitled " Christianity as old as the Creation,"* London, 1732. This book is divided into nine chapters. The first is designed by the acute and learned author to shew, what we are to understand by the law or religion of nature, from what the obligation of it arises, and how far it extends. He shews, that the religion or law of nature does not take in every thing that is founded in the nature or reason of things, which seems to be the sense the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* takes it in throughout his whole book, but only such a collection of doctrines and precepts, as is discernable to us in the use of our natural faculties: and this, though founded in nature, becomes then only properly a law to us, when it is regarded as the will of God, the supreme legislator; and our obligation to it, strictly speaking, is founded on the divine sanction of rewards and punishments. In the second chapter it is shewn, that the law or religion of nature, in the sense already explained, is not absolutely perfect. Since the law of nature is only what men are capable of discerning, in the use of their natural faculties, it can be no more perfect than human reason. If the law of nature were absolutely perfect, it must have such a clearness as to the meaning and authority of it, as can admit of nothing more in any possible circumstance; it must have such a strength of inforcement, that it cannot be heightened in any way whatsoever; and such an extent of matter, as to comprehend every thing that  
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may be fit and proper to be known or done, and not to admit of any possible article to be added to it. And he plainly proves, that the law or religion of nature is not absolutely perfect in any of these respects. Chapter third is intended to shew, that the law of nature is not immutable, in such a sense especially as to be incapable of admitting any additional precepts. And here the question concerning positive precepts is accurately stated, and it is proved that God may appoint them; and an answer is returned to the author's objections to the contrary. In chapter fourth he inquires, whether natural and revealed religion be necessarily the same; and if not, wherein the proper distinction between them both doth consist. In the former chapter he had shewn, that positive precepts might be given; here he carries it farther, and proves that some positive institutions might reasonably be expected, if ever God should reveal his will at all; both as tokens of his authority and our submission, and for the better order and decency of his worship, and the outward part of religion, and for the increase and advancement of inward piety. The same thing is urged from the concurrent sense of mankind in all ages, and under all religions. It is further shewn, there are other things of higher importance in which natural and revealed religion differ, though they are not properly opposed to each other, *e. g.* with regard to principles and doctrines not discoverable by nature's light, or as to precepts which, though founded in the nature of things, yet are not certainly knowable in the use of our own reason. They also differ in point of clearness, and in efficacy. He instances particularly in the assurance given us of the pardon of sin, divine assistances, and the eternal retributions of a future state. Chapter fifth is designed to shew, that a proper rule of life is not perfectly and easily discoverable by every man, even by those of the meanest capacity: and here it is evinced, that the author's own scheme of natural religion, which he pretends is so obvious to all mankind, is perplexed, obscure, and defective. In chapter sixth he inquires, whether a proper rule of life be more easily and perfectly discoverable by us in the use of our own reason, than the proof or meaning of a revelation can be. He shews the possibility of immediate revelation or inspiration, and that this gives the highest evidence: and that as to traditional revelation, though the evidence be not strictly demonstrative,

demonstrative, it may be such as is sufficient to determine the assent of a sober thinking man: and he answers what the author had brought to prove, that the sense and meaning of such a revelation cannot be fixed and ascertained. Chapter seventh is designed to shew, that a revelation is expedient, in order to a more easy, more perfect, and more general knowledge of the rule of life. This is distinctly evinced, both with regard to the wiser and better part of men, particularly the philosophers, and with respect to persons of a lower rank and meaner abilities: and a good answer is made to what the author had urged, concerning the supposed inconsistency between our being governed by reason and revelation. In chapter eighth it is shewn, that a revelation is expedient in order to enforce the general practice of the rule of life: that the mere pleasure of doing well, or a moral taste or sense, is not alone a sufficient balance for all the inconveniences of doing otherwise, amidst all the embarrassments of passion and temptation; nor if to this be added the civil sanctions of human authority, are these alone sufficient: for these are designed not so much to reward virtues, several of which do not come under the cognizance of human courts, as to punish crimes, and those only such as tend to the hurt of the society. Virtue can only be sufficiently enforced by sanctions established by God himself; and a revelation is expedient for that purpose. He concludes this chapter with giving a clear answer to two objections urged by the author: the one is, that if a revelation be expedient to be made to any, it must be equally expedient to be made to all, and at all times: the other is, that the revelation hath not in fact answered that purpose for which we affirm it to be expedient. The ninth, and last, chapter is intended to evince, that there is sufficient evidence of the reality of a revelation, especially of the Christian. He observes, that what is usually called the internal evidence of a revelation is not strictly and properly an evidence, but only a necessary condition or qualification of a true revelation: that external proof is the only direct evidence of a divine revelation; and this consisteth in miracles, as including prophecies, which may be considered as one sort of miracles. He shews what reason we have to believe, that the miracles recorded to have been done in favour of the Christian religion were really wrought; and



and that, supposing them to have been wrought, they were real and satisfactory proofs of a divine original.

There was another answer to Dr. Tindal's book, which I should not have chosen to take notice of, if the method I am in did not make it proper for me to do so, as I am sensible how hard it is for an author to speak of his own work, without offending his own modesty, or the delicacy of the reader. It was published at Dublin in two volumes, 8vo. in 1733, under the title of *An Answer to a late Book, intitled "Christianity as old as the Creation;"* and was afterwards reprinted at London in 1740. It is much larger, and takes a wider compass than the other answers; and therefore the account here given of it will be also larger. It is divided into two parts: In the first part, which takes up the first volume, the author's account of the law of nature is considered, and his scheme is shewn to be inconsistent with reason, and with itself, and of ill consequence to the interests of virtue, and to the good of mankind. This volume consisteth of eleven chapters, besides a large introduction, containing observations upon the author's spirit and design, and the way of reasoning made use of by him, and others of our modern deists. In the first chapter there is a general account of that writer's scheme, which lies scattered in his book with little order or method, but is here brought together in one view, and the various and inconsistent senses, in which he takes the law of nature, examined. The second chapter relates to the vast extent he gives to the law of nature, as taking in whatsoever is founded in the nature of things. This is shewn to be a strange hypothesis, when he is speaking of that law which he supposes to be known to all men, as if the whole reason and nature of things were open to every man; whereas, taken in this comprehensive view, it is only perfectly known to God himself. In the third and fourth chapters, what he hath offered to prove, that the religion or law of nature given to mankind at the beginning was so absolutely perfect that nothing could ever be afterwards added to it, and particularly that God could never institute any positive precepts, is distinctly considered: and it is proved, that God may both give men new laws suited to new circumstances of things, and may, if he seeth fit, institute positive precepts; and that these may an-  
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swer very valuable ends; and particularly, that there were wise reasons for the positive institutions both of the Jewish and Christian religion. The fifth and sixth chapters relate to what our author had advanced concerning the universal clearness of the law of nature. It is shewn at large, that it is not so obvious to all mankind, as to render an extraordinary revelation needless: that even as to those principles and duties which, absolutely speaking, are discoverable by human reason, revelation may be of great use to give a clearer and more certain knowledge of them, than the bulk of mankind, or even the wisest, could have without it. Besides which, there are several things of great importance to us to know, of which we could not have a certain assurance by the mere light of natural reason without revelation, and with regard to which, therefore, an express revelation from God would be of signal advantage, and ought to be received with great thankfulness: as particularly, with relation to the methods of our reconciliation with God when we have offended him, the terms and extent of forgiveness, and the nature, greatness, and duration of that reward, which it shall please God to confer on imperfect obedience. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> chapters it is evinced, that this writer's scheme of natural religion is very defective; and that he giveth a wrong account of some of the main principles and duties of the law of nature: that he in effect depriveth it of its strongest sanctions; and that his scheme tendeth to take away the fear of God, and to make men easy in their sins. The ninth is designed to shew, that his scheme is not fitted to answer the end he proposeth by it, the delivering mankind from superstition and priestcraft; and that a strict adherence to the Christian revelation in its original purity would have a happier influence this way. The tenth chapter relates to those passages, in which he pretends to describe the religion of deists, and to draw a parallel between that and Christianity; and it is shewn, that the advantages he would appropriate to deism do much more properly belong to the Christian religion, as laid down in the holy Scriptures. In the eleventh chapter, his pretence of introducing a new and glorious state of things is examin'd; and the whole concludes with a brief representation of the pernicious tendency and manifold inconsistencies of the author's scheme.

In the second part, the authority and usefulness of the revelation contained in the sacred writings of the Old and New Testament, is asserted and vindicated against the objections and misrepresentations of this writer. This part is divided into sixteen chapters. The first contains some considerations concerning divine revelation in general, and what are the proper characters and evidences by which it may be known that such a revelation is really given; and that our being governed by the authority of such a revelation is not inconsistent with our being governed by reason, as this author has attempted to prove. The second chapter examines his objections against the characters of the first publishers and witnesses of the Jewish and Christian revelation; and it is shewn, that we have all the assurance that we can reasonably desire, that they were neither imposed upon themselves, nor had a design to impose upon others; nor indeed, as things were circumstanced, had it in their power to do so, if they had designed it. In the third chapter his objections against the proof from miracles are considered. It is shewn, that they are neither needless nor uncertain proofs: that there are certain marks and characters by which true divine miracles may be distinguished from those pretended to be wrought by imposture, or the agency of evil spirits; and that these characters are to be found in the miracles wrought in favour of the Jewish and Christian revelation. The design of the fourth chapter is to prove, that we have all the evidence that can be reasonably desired: that the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, with an account of the facts and attestations by which that revelation was originally confirmed and established, is transmitted to us with such a degree of purity and certainty, as may be safely depended upon: and this is particularly shewn with regard to the writings of the Old Testament, especially the law of Moses. In the fifth chapter, the authority and integrity of the sacred records of the New Testament are asserted and vindicated against the author's exceptions: and that we have both sufficient external proofs of their being safely transmitted to us, and that they carry in them the greatest internal evidences of genuine truth and uncorruptedness, that can be found in any writings whatsoever. The sixth chapter shews, that the wonderful success the gospel met with, and its speedy and general propagation, furnish a strong proof, as the case was

was circumstanced, of the truth of the facts on which it is founded. The following chapters are designed to consider his objections against Scripture, drawn from the nature and manner of the revelation there contained. And first, his attempt to prove, that it is uncertain and obscure, is obviated. What he urgeth to this purpose, concerning the ambiguity and uncertainty of words, concerning the scriptures being written in dead languages, and that the translations are not to be depended on, is in the seventh chapter distinctly examined. The eighth relates to the keys of solution necessary for understanding the Scripture, which he pretends the people are wholly unacquainted with; and what he offers concerning the figurative language of Scripture, and the parables and proverbial expressions made use of by our Saviour, is considered. The ninth chapter makes it appear, that many of those passages, which this writer censures as obscure and apt to mislead the people, are so noble and of such excellent use, that a candid critic would have judged them worthy of admiration. In the tenth, an answer is given to his objections against the gospel precepts, drawn from their being delivered in a loose, general, and undetermined manner; and his argument for the obscurity of scripture, from the divisions among Christians about the sense of it, and his pretence that this would infer the necessity of an infallible guide, is shewn to be vain and inconclusive. The eleventh and twelfth chapters contain a distinct and particular examination of all those passages, whereby he pretends to prove, that the scriptures tend to lead the people into wrong apprehensions of God, and into a wrong practice with relation to the duties they owe to one another. Chapter thirteenth considers what he has offered to shew, that there is a contrast between the spirit of the Old and New Testament. In the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters, the Mosaic account of man's original dignity and the fall, and the Christian doctrine of a Mediator, are vindicated against this writer's exceptions. The last chapter contains an answer to two objections against Christianity, which have been often urged, and with which the author concludes his book: the one drawn from its not having been given and made known to all mankind in all ages and places from the beginning; the other drawn from the corruptions of Christians.

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And it is shewn, that no argument will justly hold from either of these against the usefulness and divine authority of the Christian revelation.

There was also a solid and excellent answer to *Christianity as old as the Creation*, drawn up by the reverend Mr. Simon Brown, and which well deserves a particular notice. But I fear I may be thought to have been too tedious and particular already in the account that has been given of the answers to this book, though the opinion many have entertained of it, as if it were a very formidable attack upon Christianity, will I hope in some degree plead my excuse.

## L E T T E R X.

*Another Attempt against Christianity in Dr. Morgan's Book, called, The Moral Philosopher—He seems to acknowledge the great Usefulness of Revelation, but leaves no Way of knowing when a Revelation is really given—He discards all Authority, even a divine one, in Matters of Religion, and all Proof from Miracles and Prophecy—His Invektives against the Law of Moses and the Prophets—Though he professeth himself a Christian on the Foot of the New Testament, he insinuates several Reflections on the Character of our Saviour, and endeavours to invalidate the Attestation given to Christianity by the extraordinary Gifts and Powers of the Holy Ghost—He pretends, that the Apostles preached different Gospels, and that the New Testament is a Jumble of inconsistent Religions—His Book fully confuted in the Answers that were published against him—Some Account of those Answers, as also of the second and third Volumes of the Moral Philosopher.*

SIR,

**A**S you still insist upon my continuing the correspondence on the subject of my former letters, I shall now take notice of a fresh attempt against Christianity, in a book that appeared with a pompous title, *The Moral Philosopher, in a Dialogue between Philulethes, a Christian Deist, and Theophanes, a Christian Jew*—“In which the grounds and reasons of religion in general, and particularly of Christianity as distinguished from the religion of nature; the different methods of conveying and proposing moral truth to the mind; and the necessary marks or criteria on which they must all equally depend; the nature of positive laws, &c. with many other matters of the utmost consequence to religion, are fairly considered and debated, and the arguments on both sides impartially represented,” London, 8vo. 1737. The author of this book, Dr. Morgan, seems at first view to go much farther in his concession, than other his fellow-labourers in the same cause. If we were to judge by some parts of his book, we should be ready to look upon him as having very friendly dispositions towards the Christian religion: since

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he seems expressly to acknowledge the great usefulness of divine revelation in general, and of the Christian revelation in particular. He speaks of man's natural weakness and inability; and represents those as conceited of themselves, who in the present state of mankind talk of the *strength of human reason in matters of religion*. He observes, that at the time of Christ's appearing, "mankind in general were in a state of gross ignorance and "darkness, with respect to the true knowledge of God, and of "themselves, and of all those moral relations and obligations we "stand in to the Supreme Being, and to one another: That they "were under great uncertainty concerning a future state, and "the concern of divine providence in the government of the "world, and at the same time were filled with a proud and "vain conceit of their own natural abilities and self-sufficiency: "That our Saviour's doctrines on these heads, though they ap- "peared to be the true and genuine principles of nature and rea- "son, when he had set them in a proper light, yet were such as "the people had never heard or thought of before, and never "would have known, without such an instructor, such means "and opportunities of knowledge: That they who would judge "uprightly of the strength of human reason in matters of morality "and religion, under the present corrupt and degenerate state of "mankind, ought to take their estimate from those parts of the "world which never had the benefit of revelation; and this per- "haps might make them less conceited of themselves, and more "thankful to God for the light of the gospel." He asks, "if the "religion of nature, under the present pravity and corruption of "mankind, were written with sufficient strength and clearness "upon every man's heart; why might not a Chinese, or an In- "dian, draw up as good a system of natural religion as a Chris- "tian, and why have we never met with any such?" He adds, that "let us take Confucius, Zoroaster, Plato, Socrates, or the "greatest moralist that ever lived without the light of revelation, "and it will appear, that their best systems of morality were in- "termixed and blended with so much superstition, and so many "gross absurdities, as quite eluded and defeated the main design "of them\*." This author could scarce have declared more ex- pressly than he hath here done against Tindal's darling scheme,

\* Moral Philosopher, vol. i. p. 144, 145.

concerning fuch an abfolute univerfal clearnefs and fufficiency of the light of nature in the prefent ftate of mankind, as renders revelation entirely needlefs and ufelefs. To which it may be added, that he fpeaks in many paffages very honourably of Jefus Chrift, and the religion he hath introduced, as having brought clearer difcoveries of our duty, and enforced it by ftronger motives, and provided more effectual aids, than ever was done before. And accordingly he exprefly declareth himfelf to be a *Christian on the foot of the New Testament.*

If we were to form our judgment of him merely from fuch paffages as thefe, it might be thought to be doing wrong to our moral philofopher, to rank him in the lift of the deiftical writers: but by a prevarication and a difingenuity which is not eafily paralleled, except among fome of thofe that have appeared on the fame fide, under all thefe fair pretences and difguifes, he hath covered as determined a malice againft the honour and authority of the Chriftian revelation, as any of thofe that have written before him.

It is not eafy to form a diftinct notion of what he underftandeth by that revelation, the ufefulness of which he would be thought to acknowledge. He granteth, “ that God may, if he thinks fit, communicate his will by *immediate infpiration*, or  *Supernatural illumination*; yea, and that what he thus communicates may come with evidence equal to a mathematical demonstration \*”. Yet he plainly intimates, that it can never be proved, that God had ever thus communicated his will; and treats fuch infpiration as the invention of our *spiritual fcholastics* or *systematical divines*. By feveral paffages of his book, efppecially if compared with what he faith in his fecond volume, which he publifhed in defence of it, it appeareth, that by *revelation* he underftandeth any difcovery of truth, in *what way foever a man comes by it*, even though it be by the *ftrength and fuperiority of his own natural faculties* †: So that all that have difcovered rational or moral truth by their own ftudy and application, in the ufe of their natural faculties, may be faid, according to this account of it, to have had the light of revelation: and if fo, it is not eafy to fee how he could confiftently represent whole na-

\* Moral Philofopher, vol. i. p. 83, 84.

† Ibid. p. 343. vol. ii. p. 12, 13, 25, 26. 44.



tions, among whom he reckoneth the Indians and Chinese, as *having never had the benefit of revelation*; or how he could say, that the most eminent philosophers and moralists, such as Confucius, Zoroaster, Plato, Socrates, *lived without the light of revelation*. For will he say, that none of them had any discovery or manifestation of rational moral truth made to them in any way whatsoever, no, not so much as in the exercise of their own natural faculties?

The great principle he hath laid down, and which runs through his whole book, is, that there is but one certain and infallible mark or criterion of divine truth, or of any doctrine or law as coming from God, and that is, the moral truth, reason or fitness of the thing itself, when it comes to be fairly proposed to, and considered by the mind or understanding. He frequently declareth, that we are not to receive any thing as true in religion upon any authority whatsoever\*, or upon any other foundation than its own intrinsic evidence, or moral fitness: and this he explaineth to be its conducibleness to our happiness, as appearing to our reason, independently of all authority: So that after all his fair pretences about the benefit of revelation, we are not to receive any thing upon the authority of revelation at all. Supposing any persons to have been extraordinarily sent of God, to make a discovery of his will concerning truth or duty, whatever credentials they produce to prove their divine mission, we are not to receive any thing upon that authority, no more than if they were not thus extraordinarily sent of God. The doctrines and laws they deliver as from God, in what way soever they are attested and confirmed, are really and entirely on the same footing with the opinion of philosophers or moralists, who do not pretend to be extraordinarily sent of God at all; *i. e.* we are to believe the doctrines they teach, if upon examining them we find them to be true, by reasons drawn from the nature of things; and we are to submit to their precepts and directions, if upon considering them we are satisfied that they tend to our own advantage and happiness; but their authority, abstractly from the reason of the thing, must have no weight to determine us. Thus the proper use and advantage of revelation, which is to assure us by a di-

\* Moral Philosopher, vol. ii. p. 6. 21, &c.

vine testimony of the truth of things, which either we could not have known at all, or not so certainly or clearly, by our own unassisted reason; and with regard to our practice, to direct us to our duty, and bind it upon us by express precepts, confirmed by a divine authority, is entirely set aside by this author. Accordingly he will not allow either miracles or prophecy to be any proof of divine revelation, or any reason at all for our believing any doctrines, or submitting to any laws, which have this attestation given to them. This being the true state of the case, according to him—that nothing is to be received upon the authority of revelation—it is to no great purpose to inquire how this revelation is communicated to us. Yet he makes a great noise about the uncertainty of the manner of conveying a revelation to us. He frequently seems to make a mighty difference between *immediate* and *traditional revelation*; and sometimes puts on an appearance of granting, that inspiration or extraordinary revelation from God is a sufficient ground of assurance to the person or persons to whom this revelation is originally and immediately communicated. But upon a close examination, and by comparing several passages in his book, it will be found, that he does not, and indeed cannot in consistency with his scheme, allow, that those persons to whom this revelation is immediately made, have any way of being sure of the truth of what is thus communicated, but by the reason of the thing, by its own intrinsic evidence, or apparent tendency to our benefit. And those to whom this revelation is traditionally communicated, may have the same kind of assurance; *i. e.* they may believe it, if upon examining they find it to be true, by arguments drawn from the nature and reason of the thing. So that, upon his scheme, immediate revelation makes no difference, though he often talks as if there were a very great one.

It appeareth upon this view, that though he sometimes seems absolutely to contradict and subvert the scheme of the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*; yet at the bottom, his own scheme cometh pretty much to the same thing. He, as well as that author, is for discarding all authority, even a divine one, in matters of religion; and represents the receiving any thing purely upon such authority, as a renouncing our reason. According to him, the only way any man, even of the meanest capacity, can

have to be fully assured of the truth of any doctrine in religion, is by the reason of the thing, or its own intrinsic evidence, independent of all authority or testimony: and in like manner, with regard to practice, the only way any man hath of knowing any thing to be his duty, is its conducibleness to his own happiness in the circumstances he is in; of which every man is to be the judge for himself. To put all duty and obedience upon this foot, would go a great way to dissolve all bands of government, human and divine: since upon this scheme, it is in effect left to men themselves, whether and how far they shall obey; *i. e.* so far only as they apprehend the thing required to tend to their own happiness. And certainly it cannot be denied, that considering the present darkness and corruption of mankind, and how much they are influenced by their appetites and passions, they would be in great danger, if left to themselves, of forming wrong judgments concerning their own happiness, and what is conducive to it, or connected with it. Such a scheme might be consistently advanced by Dr. Tindal, who supposed, though contrary to evident fact and experience, that the whole law of nature and fitness of things is obvious to all mankind, even to those that cannot read their mother tongue. But it seems not so easily reconcilable to the concessions made by the *Moral Philosopher* who acknowledgeth the present *weakness* and *inability* of reason, and that the law of nature is not written *with sufficient strength and clearness* in every man's heart, in the present corrupt and degenerate state of mankind.

We have seen the regard this writer hath to revelation in general. As to the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures, he expressly and avowedly rejecteth the Old Testament, and openly declareth that he will have nothing to do with it in his religion. He representeth the law of Moses, as "having neither truth nor goodnes in it, and as a wretched scheme of superstition, blindness, and slavery, contrary to all reason and common sense, set up under the specious popular pretence of a divine instruction and revelation from God." And he endeavours to prove, that this was the sentiment of St. Paul. Among other heavy charges which he hath advanced against that law, one is, that it encouraged human sacrifices, as the highest act of religion and devotion, when offered not to idols, but to God; and he takes  
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occasion to consider the case of Abraham's being commanded to offer up Isaac, which he represents as absolutely unhinging and dissolving the whole law of nature. He then goes on to consider the spirit of prophecy. He representeth the Urim and Thummim as a priestly cheat, and afterwards proceedeth to make a very odious, though inconsistent, representation of the character and conduct of the ancient prophets; against whom he exclaimeth as the great disturbers of their country, the authors of all the civil wars and revolutions in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the cause of the final ruin of both; though the contrary is evident from the very historical accounts to which he pretendeth to appeal. And he praiseth Ahab and Jezebel, and other idolatrous princes, for having endeavoured to destroy them.

As to the New Testament, though he frequently affecteth to speak with great veneration of Jesus Christ, yet he insinuateth very base and unworthy reflections upon his person and character: That he pretended to be the Messiah foretold by the prophets, though he very well knew that those prophets had only spoken of a temporal Jewish prince, who was to arise and reign in Judea; and that accordingly he suffered himself to be carried about by the mob as their Messiah for a twelvemonth together; and did not renounce that character till his death, when he absolutely disclaimed his being the Messiah foretold in the prophetic writings, and died upon that renunciation. As to the apostles, the first authorized teachers and publishers of the religion of Jesus, he affirms, that they themselves never so much as pretended to be under the unerring guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost: that they differed among themselves about the most concerning parts of revelation; and preached different, and even contrary, gospels: and that all the apostles, except St. Paul, preached what he calls the Jewish gospel, viz. *salvation by Jesus Christ as the Jewish Messiah, i. e.* the national prince and deliverer of the Jews. This, which he all along explodes as false and absurd, he represents as the only proper essential article of the Christian faith. As to the attestations given to our Saviour's divine mission, and to the doctrines taught by the apostles, by miracles, prophecy, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, he absolutely denieth them to be any proofs at all. Finally, though he professeth himself to be a *Christian on the foot of the New*

*Testament*, yet he representeth it as leaning strongly towards Judaism, which is, in his opinion, a system of superstition and tyranny. He pretends, that Christ's own disciples represented things according to their Jewish prejudices, and therefore *are not to be depended upon for a just account either of doctrines or facts*: and that the New Testament was corrected, revised, and published by the Jews, who altered it according to their own prejudices and false opinions; so that, as it now stands, it is a system of Judaism, a jumble of inconsistent religions.

You will allow me here to observe, that a writer must have an uncommon degree of confidence, to represent the New Testament as corrupted and altered by the Jews according to their own prejudices and false opinions, when not one of their peculiar and most darling notions and prejudices is to be found in this book, but much to the contrary; whereas, if they corrupted it at all, it must be supposed that they would have corrupted it in favour of those notions and prejudices. No-where is the observance of the Mosaic law prescribed to Christians, or insisted upon as necessary to the favour of God under the gospel. The Messiah there spoken of is the author of a spiritual salvation, and the Saviour of the world, not the national deliverer of the Jews only. And the Gentiles are represented as incorporated into his church and kingdom, and as sharers in his benefits, equally with the converted Jews. The New Testament is so far from being a jumble of inconsistent religions, that it is evidently one and the same scheme of religion that is carried on in the writings of the Evangelists, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Apostolical Epistles. The same doctrines are every-where taught, relating to God, to our Lord Jesus Christ, the great and only mediator between God and man, and the methods of our redemption and salvation through him; relating to the terms of our acceptance with God, to the resurrection of the dead, the general judgment, and the eternal retributions of a future state. The same excellent laws and precepts are every-where inculcated, the same duties enjoined towards God and man, the same purity of heart and life indispensably required, the same noble motives are every-where proposed to animate our obedience, the same discoveries and displays of the divine grace and mercy, the same encouragements given to the truly penitent, the same gracious assistances promised and  
provided

provided for the upright and sincere, the same awful threatenings denounced against those that go on in a course of presumptuous sin and disobedience. Thus one beautiful and harmonious scheme of religion appears throughout, uniform and consistent in all its parts, which shews that those sacred writings have not undergone any material corruption. Some have found fault, that some of those writings seem to have been written occasionally, and that the Christian religion is not delivered there in a systematical way: but it has been much more wisely ordered. If it had been delivered once for all in a formal system, it might have been more easily altered and corrupted, or at least there would have been greater ground of suspicion that it was so: whereas, as the case now stands, the doctrines and laws of it, and the most important facts relating to it, are repeated and inculcated in so many places, and on so many different occasions, that without a total alteration and corruption of those original writings, which could not be effected, the religion must still be maintained and preserved.

But to return to our *Moral Philosopher*, he honoureth himself, and those of his sentiments, with the title of *Christian Deists*, as the author of *Christianity as old as the Creation* had done before him, as if they only were the true Christians; and brandeth all others, *i. e.* those that acknowledge the divine authority of the Christian religion, as taught in the New Testament, with the character of *Christian Jews*. He frequently inveighs against all *historical faith*, and *books of historical religion*, as he calls the holy Scriptures, as of no use or importance at all; as if the belief of the important facts recorded in the gospel, relating to our Lord Jesus Christ, had nothing to do with the faith of a Christian. All the religion he is pleased to allow to those whom he characterizeth as *Christian Jews*, is only an *historical, political, clerical, mechanical faith and religion*; whilst he appropriateth *real religion*, and *moral truth and righteousness*, to himself, and those of his own faction.

One of the first tracts which appeared against the *Moral Philosopher* was an ingenious piece, written by Mr. Joseph Hallet, *viz.* *The Immorality of the Moral Philosopher, being an Answer to a Book lately published, intitled, "The Moral Philosopher,"* 8vo. 1737. He afterwards published *A Vindication of it in a Letter to the Moral Philosopher*, who had answered it. Some  
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time after, there were two large answers published to that book, of both which I shall give a distinct account. The first I shall mention is intitled, *Eusebius, or the true Christian's Defence, against a late Book, intitled, "The Moral Philosopher, Cambridge, 8vo. 1739, by John Chapman, M. A. now Dr. Chapman.* In this learned and accurate work, the author doth not examine the whole of the *Moral Philosopher's* book, nor concern himself with the particular objections he had brought against the Jewish and Christian revelation, but applies himself to consider the main principles of his scheme, and on which the whole structure depends.

He begins with his fundamental principle, viz. "that moral truth, reason, and the fitness of things, are the sole certain mark or criterion of any doctrine as coming from God." He shews the ambiguity of the phrase, and the various senses it is capable of, and that in no sense can it be understood to be a proper mark or criterion of any doctrine or law, as having come from God in a way of extraordinary revelation, concerning which alone the question lieth: That therefore we must have some other mark or criterion, which may evidence an extraordinary interposition of God, and his testimony to the truth of what is delivered in his name. And particularly he setteth himself to prove, that miracles and prophecy are evidences of an extraordinary divine interposition and testimony. He treats the question about miracles, largely and distinctly; and, after having stated the true notion of a miracle, shews, that miracles may be of such a nature, and so circumstanced, as in some cases to prove the divine mission of the persons by whom they are wrought, and the truth and divine authority of the doctrines which are attested by them, independently of all consideration of the doctrines themselves; but that when they are all considered in conjunction with the good tendency of the doctrines and laws that are thus attested, they incontestably demonstrate the divine original of those doctrines and laws. He hath good observations on the great use of miracles, as the plainest and most popular; the most short and compendious way of proving a divine revelation, and judiciously obviates the objections made against the proof from miracles, both by the *Moral Philosopher*, and by others that have written on the same argument before him. He also vindicates the argument from prophecy against this writer's exceptions.

Having

Having shewn what are the true proofs of original revelation, He proceeds to consider *traditional revelation*, concerning which the *Moral Philosopher*, after many others, had raised a great clamour, under pretence that there can be no such thing as divine Faith upon fallible human testimony. This, Dr. Chapman hath examined very fully, and hath clearly shewn, that the original revelation itself, together with the accounts of the proofs or extraordinary facts whereby it was at first attested, may be transmitted to after-ages, with such a degree of evidence, as may make it reasonable for those to whom it is thus transmitted to receive it as divine, or as having originally come from God, and consequently may lay a just foundation for their receiving it with a divine faith. He afterwards applieth what he had said concerning the original proofs of revelation, and concerning that revelation's being safely transmitted to after-ages, to the revelation which was published by our Lord Jesus Christ, and his apostles. He sheweth at large, that the miracles which were wrought were of such a kind, as were sufficient alone to prove to eye-witnesses his and their divine mission, and, when farther considered in conjunction with the doctrines taught by him and them, amounted to a full demonstration of it. He then proceeds to shew, that these miracles, together with particular accounts of our Lord's doctrines, and those of his apostles, were faithfully recorded, and committed to writing by those who were witnesses to them; and that these writings have been transmitted with unquestionable evidence of their being genuine and uncorrupted in all material points: and that therefore we cannot refuse to receive them, but upon principles which would absolutely destroy the credit of all past facts whatsoever.

He next proceeds to consider and explain the nature of the Christian religion as distinguished from deism, which the *Moral Philosopher* and others would confound. He answers the objections those writers had urged from the pretended ambiguity and obscurity of scripture, and the differences among Christians about the interpretation of the Christian doctrines; and concludes with a vindication of that great article of the Christian faith, which this writer had endeavoured to pervert and expose, concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true Messiah foretold by the prophets. The prophecies relating to the Messiah are considered;



considered; and from thence it is evinced, that he was not to be merely a national Prince, and deliverer of the Jews, but the Saviour of the world; and was not merely to erect a temporal dominion, but a spiritual kingdom of truth and righteousness.

There was another answer published about the same time, *viz.* *The divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted, &c. against the unjust Aspersions and false Reasonings of a Book, intitled "The Moral Philosopher,"* London, 8vo. 1739. After what was said on a like occasion in my last letter, I shall make no apology for giving some account of this answer; which is the rather necessary, because the *Moral Philosopher*, in the second volume he published, and of which some notice must be taken afterwards, bent his force principally against it. The design of this answer was to take a distinct view of what Dr. Morgan had offered both against revelation in general, and against the holy Scriptures in particular: and it cost some pains to range the objections of that writer in some order, which are scattered with a strange confusion through his book. This answer begins with stating the question concerning revelation in general, the usefulness of which the *Moral Philosopher* makes a shew of acknowledging, and yet in effect leaveth no way of knowing when such a revelation is really given. His pretended sole criterion of moral truth and fitness is examined; and it is shewn, that miracles may be so circumstanced for number, nature, and continuance, as to yield a sufficient attestation to the divine mission of the persons by whom, and to the divine authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which they are wrought: and that the account of these extraordinary miraculous facts, as well as the laws and doctrines attested and confirmed by them, may be transmitted to us in such a manner, that it would be perfectly unreasonable to deny or doubt of them.

From the question concerning revelation in general, the author of this answer proceeds to what is the principal design of his book, *viz.* to vindicate the revelation contained in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. And first, the law of Moses is vindicated at large against the objections of the *Moral Philosopher*; and the excellent design, nature, and tendency of it is distinctly shewn. Particularly, that law is cleared from the charge of countenancing and encouraging human sacrifices: and

as the case of Abraham's offering up Isaac has been often insisted upon, and particularly is represented by this writer, as absolutely subversive of the whole law of nature, and a command which it was impossible for God to give, or for us to have any proof that it was given, care is taken to set this whole matter in a proper light, and to answer the objections that have been made against it. The same is done with regard to the war against the Benjamites in the affair of Gibeah, of which our author had made a most odious representation, with a view to cast a reflection on the oracle of Urim and Thummim. The prophet Samuel and David are cleared from the unjust aspersions he had cast upon them: and the scandalous representation he had made of the latter's dancing naked before the ark; as also what Lord Shaftesbury had offered on the same subject, and concerning the *naked saltant spirit of prophecy*, are considered, and the injustice and absurdity of it shewn. The characters of the ancient prophets are vindicated; and the author's gross falsifications, and strange perversions of the Scripture-history exposed. With regard to the objections brought by the *Moral Philosopher* against the New Testament, particular notice is taken of his base insinuations against the character of our blessed Saviour, and especially of his pretence, that Jesus at his death renounced his being the Messiah foretold by the prophets. It is shewn, that he claimed to be the Messiah, and that he was really so in the true sense of their prophetic writings. As to the apostles, it is proved, in opposition to what he had confidently asserted to the contrary, both that they themselves professed to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that they gave sufficient proofs to convince the world of their divine mission. The attestation given to them by the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost is particularly considered; and the author's pretence, that the false teachers, as well as the true, had those extraordinary gifts and powers, and made use of them in confirmation of their false doctrines, is examined, and shewn to be vain and groundless. The account he giveth of the *Jewish Gospel*, which he pretends was preached by all the apostles but St. Paul, is shewn to be entirely his own fiction; and the harmony between St. Paul and the other apostles, and the wisdom and consistency of their conduct, are manifested. The attempt he maketh against the whole canon of the New Testament,

as if it were corrupted and interpolated by the Jews, is considered. And whereas, under pretence, of rectifying the errors of Christianity with regard to some particular doctrines of Christianity, he had severely inveighed against the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction; this is vindicated against his exceptions. Finally, the argument he would draw from the differences among Christians, to prove that none of the doctrines of revealed religion are of any certainty or use to mankind, is shewn to be vain and inconclusive.

The author of the *Moral Philosopher*, who was a writer of great vivacity, did not continue long silent. He published a defence of his former book, in what he called *The second volume of the Moral Philosopher; or, a farther Vindication of Moral Truth and Reason*. This was chiefly designed against the author of the answer last mentioned, except a long letter addressed to Eusebius, *i. e.* Dr. Chapman. In this book, he talks with the same confusion that he did before, concerning moral truth and reason, as being the sole criterion of divine truth, or truth as coming from God; without adding any new proof, or distinctly explaining what he means by it. He represents his adversaries, and all the advocates for revelation, as *renouncing all evidence from nature and reason in matters of religion*; and that, in their scheme, natural and revealed religion are two *essentially different and opposite religions*. This is a very unfair representation: since he could not but know, that they maintain, that there is a harmony and connection between reason and revelation; and that revelation leaves all the proofs of religion drawn from reason in their full force, and adds to them the attestation of a divine authority or testimony. And this must certainly be of great weight. It gives a farther degree of certainty and evidence, even with regard to those things, of which we might have some discovery by our reason before, as well as furnisheth a sufficient ground of assent with regard to things, which we could not have known by mere unassisted reason.

As to the proofs of revelation, he still insisteth upon it, that miracles are no proofs: but he takes very little notice of what his answerers, and particularly Dr. Chapman, who had treated this question largely and distinctly, had offered to prove that they are so. He lays down several observations tending to shew the  
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great difficulty there is in knowing which are true miracles. To this purpose he observes, that men may easily be mistaken, and think those things to be miracles which are not so; or they may be imposed upon by artifice, or the strength of their own imaginations, so as to take those things to have been done, which really were not done: That persons are much more liable to be deceived, and often have been so, in judging of things supposed to be supernatural, than in things that come in the common course: and that if even those before whom they are supposed to have been originally wrought may be thus deceived, much more those to whom they come only by report. All that follows from these, and other observations to the same purpose, amounts really to no more than this, that great and particular care and caution is necessary to guard against deception in things of so extraordinary a nature. But it is far from proving, either that it is impossible that any true miracles should ever be done, or that we should have any satisfactory evidence or certainty concerning them. Notwithstanding all that this writer hath offered, it is still true, that miracles may be so circumstanced with regard to their number, nature, and continuance, that persons may be as certain of their having been really done, as they can be of any facts whatsoever for which they have the testimony of all their senses; and may be also certain, that they are things absolutely exceeding all human power. They may also be of such a nature and tendency, and so manifestly designed to promote the cause of righteousness and virtue, that we may be sure they were not done by any evil being superior to man; and must therefore have been done either by the immediate power of God himself, or by superior good beings acting under his direction. It hath been often shewn, that such were the miracles wrought at the first establishment of the Jewish and Christian dispensation. They were done in so open a manner, and produced such effects, that those before whom they were wrought had as full an assurance of the reality of them, as they could have of any facts whatsoever; and at the same time could not be but sensible that they exceeded all the power of man. And they were also of such a nature, that they could not without the highest absurdity be supposed to have been wrought by any evil being or beings; and therefore ought to be regarded as the testimony of God to the divine mission of  
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the persons by whom, and to the truth and divine original and authority of the doctrines and laws in confirmation of which they were wrought.

Our author indeed hath in this book made an extraordinary attempt, with regard to the miracles of Moses, to prove, that though that vast assembly of people were made to believe that those things were done before their eyes, and that they themselves saw them done, yet they were never really done at all; and in order to account for this, he makes some of the wildest suppositions that ever entered into the head of any man that was not absolutely out of his senses. But lest this should not take, his next attempt is to prove, that those miracles, if wrought at all, were done by an evil power: as if any evil being, even supposing, what is absurd to imagine, that he were capable of exerting such amazing acts of divine power as were exhibited at the establishment of the Mosaic dispensation, would do it, to confirm a system of laws, which prescribed the adoration of the one living and true God, in opposition to the then spreading idolatry, and strongly obliged men to the practice of virtue and righteousness. The chief proof he bringeth for so strange an assertion is, the command relating to the destruction of the Canaanites, on account not only of their impure and cruel idolatries, but of the most abominable crimes and vices, which then universally prevailed among them; as if it were impossible for God, in any circumstances of things, ever to give such a command. This, which hath been frequently urged by the writers on that side, particularly Dr. Tindal, was considered in the *Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation*, vol. ii. p. 352—358, 2d edit. And upon its being here repeated by the *Moral Philosopher*, was again examined and obviated in the 2d volume of *The Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, p. 97, &c. It is also set in a proper light by Mr. Lowman, in his *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, p. 220, &c.

As to our Saviour's miracles, this writer pretendeth, contrary to Christ's own most express declarations, that he did not appeal to them as proofs of his divine mission. He also repeateth the stale objection, which hath been often answered and exposed, that the miraculous cures which Jesus wrought were owing to the strength of fancy and imagination in the patient, and not to power

power in the agent. But, whatever we suppose the force of imagination in some cases to be, there are many of our Lord's miracles of such a kind, that there cannot possibly be the least room or pretence for such a supposition.

With regard to the conveyance of divine revelation, it had been shewn, that doctrines and laws which were originally received by revelation from God, together with an account of the extraordinary facts or proofs whereby that revelation was attested, may be transmitted to after-ages in a manner that may be safely depended upon; and that the doctrines and facts of the Christian revelation have been so transmitted. He hath little to oppose to the clear and distinct proofs that were brought for this, but some general clamours, which he repeateth on all occasions, about the uncertainty of tradition and fallibility of human testimony; though it be incontestably evident, that laws and facts may be, and often have been, transmitted in this way, with such a degree of evidence and certainty, that it would be perfectly unreasonable, and contrary to common sense, to deny or doubt of them: and yet all along throughout his whole book, he argues as if it were sufficient to destroy the authority of the scripture-revelation, that its doctrines and laws, and the account of its important facts, have been transmitted through the hands of weak and fallible men. This he representeth as a placing the most important divine truth on the foot of fallible human testimony. But however specious this may appear, and fitted to impose upon superficial inquirers, there is nothing in it of real weight: for if a revelation or law had any original divine authority, and, that it might be of use to succeeding ages, was committed to writing, which is the surest method of conveyance; and if we have sufficient evidence to give us reasonable assurance, that this written revelation has been safely transmitted to us, without any material corruption or alteration, as hath been often plainly shewn with regard to the Christian revelation; then it is as really of divine authority now as it was at first, and we are obliged to receive and submit to it as such. For it doth not lose its authority by being committed to writing; nor doth its authority depend on the intermediate conveyers, any more than the authority of a law formerly enacted by the legislature can be said to depend upon

the persons by whom it has been transcribed or printed, but upon its having been originally enacted by the legislature\*.

As to the objections this writer had urged in his former book against the revelation contained in the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and which had been particularly considered, he repeats them again in this book with greater confidence than before, and often without taking the least notice of what was offered to the contrary; or if he makes a shew of answering, very lightly passeth over what was of principal importance in the argument. He gives himself little trouble about the gross misrepresentations and falsifications of the sacred history which had been plainly proved upon him, but still persisteth in the charges he had advanced, and addeth farther invectives; at the same time assuring his reader, that his answerer *had not said one word to the purpose*, and that what he had offered was *one continued rant*. And sometimes, as in the case of the Messiah's being, according to the prophetic writings, a mere temporal prince of the Jews only, our author, instead of answering the proofs which had been brought to the contrary, declares it to be a point so evident, that he *scorns to dispute with any man that will deny it*, i. e. he scorns to dispute with any man that will not give him up the very point in question.

These are arts of controversy which none would envy him the honour of. And he frequently expresseth himself in a manner that shews little regard to common decency: as when he saith of David, *Away with him to the devil from whence he came!* And speaking of the Jews, he avers, that this *miraculously stupid people was always inspired and possessed with the spirit of the devil*. And the Christians come in for their share of the compliment; for he adds, that *they, i. e. the Jews, have transfused their spirit and faith into Christians*.

It would not be worth while to mention these things, if it were not to give some idea of the temper and genius of this writer. He has gone so far as boldly to pronounce, that the God of Israel, to whom the priesthood was *instituted*, and *sacrifices were offered*, was a *cheat* and an *idol*, as much so as any of the Pagan

\* See concerning this, "Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted," vol. ii. p. 24, 25.

deities, and that he was only considered as a local tutelar deity; though one would think it scarce possible for any man seriously to read the Old Testament, and not be sensible that the God there every-where recommended to our adoration and obedience, and whom the people of Israel were obliged by their law to worship, exclusively of all idol deities, is represented as the maker of heaven and earth, the sovereign Lord of the universe. In his former book, he had sometimes spoken with great seeming respect of Christianity; but here he throws off all disguise, and does what he can to expose it to the derision and contempt of mankind. Nothing can be more scandalous than the representation he makes of the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. He avers, that those who had the gift of tongues could not speak those languages with any sense, coherence, or consistency; that they only uttered a strange kind of gibberish, which neither they themselves nor any body else could understand. And yet it appears from the account that is given us, that the people of many different countries, which were come from all parts to Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost, understood the apostles, as speaking to them in their several languages the *great things of God*, and were filled with such admiration on this account as produced the conversion of great numbers of them to the Christian faith. He pronounces, that they who seemed to have these gifts *were out of their wits for the time*, and expressly calls them *frantic fits*; and what is very extraordinary, pretends to prove all this from the authority of St. Paul himself, who, according to his representation, must have been one of the maddest enthusiasts that ever lived; though at other times he thinks fit to extol him as *the bold and brave defender of religion and liberty*.

He concludes his book with a fresh invective against the law of Moses, as if it were designed to indulge men in personal intemperance, and were wholly calculated for the interest of his own family; though no lawgiver ever gave greater proofs of his disinterestedness than Moses did; as he made no provision for raising his own children to honours and dignities in the state, but left them to continue in the rank of common Levites. The last thing he mentions is the law about the trial of jealousy, of which he gives a strange account. But this, as was clearly proved against him, dependeth wholly upon his own false and arbitrary



suppositions, which betray either great ignorance or wilful representation\*.

It could not be a very agreeable employment to carry on a controversy with such a writer. There is however a second volume published of the *Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, by the author of the first, which was designed as answer to the second volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, London 8vo, 1740. In this reply, every thing in his book is confident that had any appearance of reason and argument; and his unrepresentations, his unjust aspersions, and confident attempts impose falsehoods upon his reader, are detected and exposed. A whereas there is no part of his book that seems to have been malaboured, than where he undertakes to prove, that the tribe Levi had above twenty shillings in the pound upon all the land of Israel, the extravagance of his computations is plainly shewn. But no man hath set this matter in a clearer light, than Mr. Le man, in his learned and judicious *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews; in which the Justice, Wisdom, and Goodness of the Mosaical Constitution are vindicated; in particular from some late unfair and false Representations of them in "Moral Philosopher,"* London, 8vo, 1740.

But this author was not to be convinced or silenced. He has after published what he called the *Third Volume of the Moral Philosopher; or, Superstition and Tyranny inconsistent with Theocracy*, London, 8vo, 1740. In the body of this book, which particularly designed as an answer to the second volume of *Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, there is scarce any thing new attempted. The same things are repeated over again, in a strain of confidence peculiar to this writer and at this rate it is easy to write books and carry on controversies without end. But there scarce needs any other confutation of what he hath here offered, than to desire the reader careful to compare it with the book to which it is pretended to be answer. The only farther observation I would make upon it that our author, contrary to his usual custom, has in one instance condescended to acknowledge a mistake he had been guilty of

\* See "Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted," ii. p. 362, & seq.

his former volume. It is in his computation of the Levitical revenues, in which he had made an overcharge in one single article of no less than one million two hundred thousand pounds a year. Yet so fond is he of what he had advanced concerning the Levites having, by the Mosaical constitution, the whole wealth and power of the nation in their hands, that he still endeavours to support it by some very extraordinary calculations; the falsity and absurdity of which was soon after clearly and fully exposed by Mr. Lowman, in an appendix to his *Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews*, London, 1741. But the most remarkable thing in the third volume of the *Moral Philosopher*, and that part of it which may be most properly called new, is a long introduction, of above an hundred pages, in which he pretends to give an account of the ancient patriarchal religion, and an historical relation of the descent of the Hebrew shepherds into Egypt; the rise and foundation of the Mosaic theocracy; the inconsistencies and self-contradictions of the Hebrew historians, &c. In this part of his work he hath, if possible, exceeded himself in misrepresentation and abuse: but I shall take no farther notice of it than to observe, that there were solid and ingenious remarks made upon it, by a gentleman that styles himself "Theophanes Cantabrigiensis," in a pamphlet intitled, *The ancient History of the Hebrews vindicated*, Cambridge, 8vo, 1741. And afterwards by Dr. Samuel Chandler, in his *Vindication of the History of the Old Testament, in answer to the Misrepresentations and Calumnies of Thomas Morgan, M. D. and Moral Philosopher*: the first part of which was published, London, 1741, and a second part came out in 1743, and after Dr. Morgan's death. It is here plainly proved, that this writer hath been guilty of manifest falsehoods, and of the most gross perversions of the scripture-history, even in those very instances in which he assureth his reader, he hath kept close to the accounts given by the Hebrew historians. The author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, who wrote soon after, thought fit to make a very contemptuous representation of Dr. Chandler's performance. He is pleased to represent him, as having levelled all his artillery of wit, learning, and spleen against the *Moral Philosopher*, Dr. Morgan, instead of answering; and as having fired off twenty sheets to shoot one of his, and missed the mark\*.

\* *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 71, 72. edit. 3d.

This no doubt must pass for a full confutation of Dr. Chandl work. But all that can be gathered from it is, that, with the gentlemen, the proving of any of them guilty of the most gross falsifications of scripture, which had been fully proved upon Morgan, is to pass for a thing of no consequence; as if falsehood and misrepresentation were to be looked upon as very allowable when put in practice for so good an end as the exposing Christianity and the holy scripture. It is proper here to observe, that the ingenious Mr. Hallet, who, as was mentioned before, early appeared against the first volume of the *Moral Philosopher* published also *A Rebuke to the Moral Philosopher for the Errors and Immoralities contained in his third Volume*, 8vo, 1740.

I shall conclude this account of the *Moral Philosopher* by observing, that soon after his third volume appeared, Dr. Chandler published a second volume of his *Eusebius, or the Christian's farther Defence against the Principles and Reasons of the Moral Philosopher*, London, 8vo, 1741. In this he considers at large all that this writer had offered concerning what he calls the Jewish gospel, which he confidently affirms to be preached by all the apostles but St. Paul, and of which he pretends the temporal kingdom of Christ in the Jewish sense was the principal article. He shews, with the clearest evidence, that it was not preached by any of the apostles, and that there was a perfect harmony between them and St. Paul, as to what concerns the authority and obligation of the Jewish law under the gospel. He also judiciously explains and vindicates the scripture-doctrine of redemption, and the satisfaction of Christ, against the author's objections and gross misrepresentations.

The following this extraordinary writer through his several books, and the answers that were made to him, has engaged in a detail which I am afraid has not proved very agreeable to you, any more than it has been so to myself. But it may be of some use to shew, that, notwithstanding his boasted pretences, there have been few writers who have been more effectually confuted and exposed, than he that was pleased to honour himself with the title of the *Moral Philosopher*.

L E T T E R XI.

*Observations upon the pernicious Tendency of the Pamphlet intitled Christianity not founded on Argument—The Design of it is to shew, that the Christian Faith has nothing to support it but a senseless Enthusiasm—The Author's great Disingenuity and Misrepresentations of Scripture detected—He strikes at natural Religion, as well as revealed, destroys all Certainty of Reason, and declares against Education, and the instructing Children in any Principles at all—The principal Arguments he hath offered in Support of his Scheme considered—Christianity no Enemy to Examination and Inquiry—Men's being commanded to believe, no Presumption that Faith is not a reasonable Assent—The Faith required in the Gospel is properly a Virtue, and the Unbelief there condemned is really a Vice—His Pretence, that the People are not capable of discerning the Force of the Proofs brought for Christianity, and therefore cannot be obliged to believe it, examined—Account of the Answers published against him.*

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THE controversy with the *Moral Philosopher* was scarce at an end, when a new and very remarkable pamphlet appeared, intitled, *Christianity not founded on Argument*, London, 1742. The author of this carried on his design against the Christian religion, in a way somewhat different from what others had done before him. Under specious appearances of zeal for religion, and under the cover of devout expressions, he hath endeavoured to shew, that the Christian faith hath no foundation in reason, nor hath any thing to support it but a wild and senseless enthusiasm, destitute of all proof and evidence. And if this could be made out, it would no doubt answer the intention he too plainly appears to have had in view, the exposing the Christian religion to the derision and contempt of mankind. With great gravity and seeming seriousness he sets himself to shew, that a rational faith, *i. e.* as he explains it, "an assent to revealed truth founded upon the conviction of the understanding, is a false and un-

“warrantable notion\*.” That “that person best enjoys faith who never asked himself one single question about it, and never dealt at all in the evidence of reason †.” That God never intended that we should make use of our reason, or intellectual faculty at all in believing, or that our faith should be founded upon any evidence which might convince the judgment, or make it reasonable for us to believe. This he undertakes formally to prove, first by several arguments drawn from the nature of reason and religion; and afterwards he endeavoureth to prove the same thing from the account given us in scripture.

Having thus, as he pretends, removed the false grounds of faith and religion, and shewn that it hath nothing to do with reason or argument, he next proceeds to declare what is the true principle of faith; and this he resolves wholly into a *constant particular revelation, imparted separately and supernaturally to every individual ‡*: That “the Holy Ghost irradiates the souls of believers at once with an irresistible light from heaven, that flashes conviction in a moment; so that this faith is completed in an instant, and the most perfect and finished creed produced at once, without any tedious progress in deductions of our own §.” He represents this great dictator and infallible guide, as having promised “to abide with us to the end of the world, that we might not be left liable one moment to a possibility of error and imposture ||; and as speaking the same thing to all, and bringing them to think all alike \*\*. Nothing can be more absurd in itself, nothing more contrary to plain undeniable fact, than this immediate infallible inspiration of every particular person, which causes *men to think all alike*, and does not leave them liable one moment to a *possibility of error and imposture*; and yet this he makes to be the sole foundation of the Christian faith. He represents it to be of such a nature as to render all outward instruction, and even the scriptures themselves, entirely needless; and that those who are thus instructed by the spirit, “need not concern themselves about the credit of ancient miracles, or the genuineness of distant records:” as if the Christian faith had nothing to do with the facts recorded in the gospels. This

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 7.

† Ibid. p. 29.

‡ Ibid. p. 112.

§ Ibid. p. 89.

|| Ibid. p. 60.

\*\* Ibid. p. 89.

he calls the *revealed and scriptural account of the matter*\*; and pretends, that "this account depends not upon the strength of any single quotation whatever, but on the joint tendency and tenor of the whole †."

This pamphlet was received by the enemies of Christianity with great applause; and yet, upon a close examination, there are such apparent marks of great dissingenuity in it, as should tend, with fair and candid minds, to give very disadvantageous impressions both of the author, and of a cause that needs such base arts to support it.

The whole turn of the pamphlet is in a religious strain: he formally pretends to offer up his most ardent prayers in behalf of his friend at the throne of grace, "that God would be pleased  
 " himself to illuminate and irradiate his mind with a perfect and  
 " thorough conviction of the truth of his holy gospel; that the  
 " same Holy Spirit that first dictated the divine law would power-  
 " fully set on his seal, and attest its authority in his heart ‡." Such a strain of ridicule as this, for whosoever impartially considers this treatise can regard it in no other view, is one of the most solemn mockeries that were ever offered to the Supreme Being. In many other passages, under pretence of exalting the influence of the Holy Spirit, the scriptures are depreciated, as of no use: They are called, by way of contempt, *manuscript authorities*, and *paper revelations*; as if the being committed to writing could destroy the authority of a divine law; when the man would be thought out of his senses that should, under the same pretence, attempt to invalidate the authority of human laws. It is observable, that the most highflown enthusiasts have always spoken with disregard of the holy scripture, and represented it as a *dead letter*; which by the way is no great sign of its being of an enthusiastical nature and tendency: and this writer hath endeavoured to take advantage of their madness for exposing the authority of the sacred writings. Thus the deists can upon occasion run into the wilds of enthusiasm, and join with the men they most heartily despise, in order to answer their design of exposing Christianity. Such hath been the fate of holy writ, to be

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 68.

† Ibid. p. 105.

‡ Ibid. p. 112.

undervalued by those that had no religion at all, and by those that have carried religion up to madness and phrenzy.

But what greatly strengthens the charge of disingenuity against this writer is, that he is guilty of the most gross misrepresentations of scripture, and the matters of fact therein contained: some of which are of such a kind as to be scarce reconcilable to any degree of honesty and candour. He pretends to prove, from the plain narrative part of the New Testament history, that Christ and his apostles, in planting the gospel, never proposed arguments or evidences of any kind to engage men to believe: whereas it is manifest, from the accounts given in the *gospels*, the *acts*, and the *epistles*, that the method Christ and his apostles took to make converts was, by assiduous instruction, by teaching and preaching, and by laying before them evidences of the most convincing kind, and which made it reasonable for them to believe.

There can scarce be a more glaring instance of disingenuity than to assert, as this writer does, contrary to Christ's own most express declarations (concerning which, see John v. 36. x. 25. 38. xiv. 11. Matth. xi. 3, 4, 5, 6.), that he himself never designed, that his miracles should be regarded as proofs and evidences of his divine mission; that he was *always remarkably upon the reserve when he happened among unbelieving company*: and that he took particular care that his miracles should not come to public notice, and *See thou tell no man* was generally the charge: though it is manifest from the whole gospel, that he generally wrought his miracles in the most public way, before great numbers of people, and in the presence even of his most malicious adversaries; and there were only a very few instances in which he seemed to be upon the reserve, for which no doubt there were good reasons, some of which may be gathered from the circumstances of the cases mentioned. But such is the manner of this writer; if he can find a particular instance or two that seem favourable to his intention, he lays hold of this, contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel-history, and would put it upon his reader, as if what was done for special reasons in a very few instances, were constantly and always the case in every instance. Thus he positively asserts, that our Saviour "constantly stipulated before-hand, for a certain degree, and no ordinary one, of confidence and persuasion in the persons on whom he wrought  
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"his miracles\*." This he seems to lay a particular stress upon; and yet it is so far from being true that this was *constantly* the case, that there are comparatively but a very few instances in which he previously required persons to profess their belief in him. In one of the answers to this pamphlet, there are near fifty instances produced of miracles wrought by our Saviour where no such thing was required †. And in the few instances where it was insisted upon, it was not a commanding those to believe in an instant who did not believe before: it was only a requiring them to profess the faith they already had, and a declaring his approbation of their faith, and was designed as a means to strengthen it more and more. And the propriety of his taking this method in some instances is manifest, as it tended to direct men's views to that which was the principal use and end of his miracles, and which our author hath thought fit to deny, *viz.* to confirm their faith in his divine mission.

With the same unfairness he confidently avers, that, according to the scripture accounts, the apostles always expected to make their converts by a word's speaking; that they never allowed any time for deliberation, but denounced damnation against those that hesitated in the least; and that they discouraged all examination and inquiry: when on the contrary it appeareth, that they often staid a considerable time together in a place, reasoning in the synagogues, repeating their excellent instructions, and performing the most illustrious miracles, as proofs of their divine mission. Thus St. Paul abode for a long time at Iconium, for a year and six months at Corinth, and for above two years at Ephesus. It is also evident that they encouraged men to examination and inquiry, and commended them when they did so: a remarkable instance of which we have in the encomium bestowed upon the Bereans, who examined the apostles' doctrine, and *searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so*, as they had taught them: and the consequence of this their diligent examination was, that *many of them believed*, Acts xvii. 10, 11, 12.

The representation this author makes of the influence of the Holy Spirit imparted to all believers is also highly disingenuous,

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 49.

† Benson's Reasonableness of the Christ. Relig. &c. p. 181—188.

though



though in it he pretends to keep close to the scripture accounts. He represents it as absolutely excluding all outward teaching, and all use of our own endeavours: and yet nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole gospel, that we are required to be diligent in the use of our own endeavours; and the great usefulness of outward teaching is constantly supposed, and provision is made for its continuance in the Christian church. With the like candour he pretendeth, that, according to the scripture account, faith is perfected in an instant, and admitteth of no degrees; and that the Spirit causeth all believers to *think all alike*, and raiseth them above all *possibility of error*: whereas it is evident, that faith is there represented as not ordinarily completed at once, but capable of continual growth and improvement, and as admitting of various degrees. And it is everywhere supposed, that believers may in many things be of different sentiments, and are to bear with one another in their differences.

These, and other things of the like kind, are so palpably misrepresented, that it can hardly be supposed that this writer himself, who is quick-sighted enough when he pleases, should not have been sensible that they were so.

Another thing that may give us no very advantageous notion of the author's design is, that he hath advanced several things which seem to have a bad aspect on natural religion as well as revealed, and representeth the former as not founded on reason and argument any more than the latter. He pretends, that all attempts to prove the principles of natural religion by reason hath done more harm than good; and that "even upon the plainest question in nature, the existence of a Deity, the laboured productions of Dr. Clarke himself have rather contributed to make for the other side of the question, and raised a thousand new doubts in the reader's mind\*." Accordingly he takes a great deal of pains to destroy all certainty of reason. He represents it as perpetually fluctuating, and never capable of coming to a certainty about any thing; and as if truth and falsehood may be equally proved by it. The bulk of mankind are, according to him, under a natural incapacity of acting at all: and as to *the ablest and best of men*, "they are equally disqualified for fair reasoning

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 81.

" by their natural prejudices; which, being ever earlier than the first efforts of reason, is as absolute a disqualification for such a trial, as the greatest natural incapacity\*."

But surely all who have any regard to religion, or who think that reason is an advantage or privilege, and that men are to be regarded as rational thinking beings, moral agents, must look upon this way of representing things as absolutely subversive of all religion and morality. It tends to debase and vitiate human nature, and to cast dishonour upon God's government and providence; as if he had taken no care of mankind at all, but gave them up entirely to their passions, without any principle of reason to guide or govern them; or at least had placed them in such circumstances, that, as this writer declares, reason always *comes too late with its assistance*, and not till we are *lost in the power of evil habits beyond recovery*.

To all this it may be added, that there are several passages in his book, in which he absolutely declares against instructing children in religious or moral principles, as a wicked attempt to prepossess their tender minds, and as barring all farther improvement. No care is to be taken to cultivate the minds of young persons, under pretence that this would only tend to fill them with prejudices. Thus there is no advantage at all in being born in an enlightened or civilized age or nation; and a child in Great Britain must be left as much without instruction, as if he were born in the wilds of America. To make this scheme of a piece, and perfectly consistent, it should be so contrived, that children should not be trained up to any language at all, and that they should be kept from all converse with others, for fear of their being prepossessed; and that they should be left wholly to nature, without instruction of any kind. And what a hopeful state of things this would introduce, is easy to see. Thus, to avoid Christianity, these gentlemen seem willing to sink us into the lowest degree of barbarism and brutality.

Having made these general observations on the spirit and design of this applauded performance, and the pernicious tendency of it to subvert all certainty of reason, and natural religion as well as revealed, I shall now take some notice of the principal

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 17, 18. 23. 26.

things he hath offered in support of his scheme, and to shew that Christianity hath no foundation in reason.

One of his arguments bears a near affinity to what has been just mentioned concerning education; for he produceth it as a proof, that the christian religion is not a rational one, because we are baptized into it, and obliged to train up children in the knowledge and belief of it. A strange argument this! since common sense tells us, that the more rational and excellent any religion is, the more requisite it would be to instruct children in the principles of it, and to set its doctrines and evidences in a proper light before them, as far as they are capable of receiving them: for this would be the best preservative against the pernicious influence of corrupt principles, and the power of wrong affections and evil habits, which otherwise, by the author's own acknowledgment, would be apt to get the start of them, and give a wrong bias to the mind.

He seems to lay a great stress on the sudden conversions we sometimes read of in the New Testament: but they are far from being proofs of what he brings them to prove, that those persons were converted without reason and evidence. All that can be fairly concluded from those instances is, that the evidence that was offered was so strong, and came with such light and force, as did more to produce conviction in a short time, than a long course of abstracted reasonings would have done. If there were some thousands, as he observes, converted at one lecture\*, these instances only relate to the conversions that were wrought at Jerusalem soon after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, of which the people had such convincing evidences by the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and the signal and undeniable miracles wrought by the disciples in the name of a risen Jesus, as, joined with what they had known before of our Saviour's admirable discourses and illustrious miracles, as well as the extraordinary events that had happened at his crucifixion, to which they themselves had been witnesses, rendered the evidence so strong and striking, that it was perfectly rational to submit to it, and receive it.

The passage of the apostle, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. *The weapons of our*

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 39.

warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, or reasonings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, is produced by this writer to shew that the gospel is not only without all evidence, but contrary to reason. And yet the manifest design of it is to shew, not that the gospel had no evidence to support it, but that the evidences accompanying it were so strong and convincing, as were vastly superior to any arguments or reasonings that could be brought against it. But there is no injunction there laid upon Christians, as the author pretends, "to lay reason under the most absolute restraint and prohibition, and not to permit it the least opportunity or freedom to exert itself, or interpose upon any occasion whatsoever\*."

Another argument with which he makes a mighty parade is to this purpose, that no religion can be rational that is not founded on a free and impartial examination†. And such examination supposes a perfect neutrality to the principles which are examined, and even a temporal disbelief of them, which is what the gospel condemneth. But this proceeds upon a wrong account of the nature of free examination and inquiry. It is not necessary to a just inquiry into doctrines or facts, that a man should be absolutely indifferent to them before he begins that inquiry, much less that he should actually disbelieve them; as if he must necessarily commence atheist, before he can fairly examine into the proofs of the existence of God. It is sufficient to a candid examination, that a man applieth himself to it with a mind open to conviction, and a disposition to embrace truth on which side soever it shall appear, and to receive the evidence that shall arise in the course of the trial. And if the inquiry relateth to principles in which we have been instructed, then, supposing those principles to be in themselves rational and well founded, it may well happen, that, in inquiring into the grounds of them, a fair examination may be carried on without seeing cause to disbelieve, or doubt of them through the whole course of the enquiry; which in that case will end in a fuller conviction of them than before.

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 84.

† Ibid. p. 5.

But

But there is no argument on which he seems to place a greater stress, to shew that Christianity is not founded on reason and evidence, than this, that we are there authoritatively commanded to believe, and penalties are denounced against us if we do not believe: whereas it is plain, that “no proposition can be tendered to our reason with penalties annexed, or under the restraint of threats and authority:” since assent or dissent is an “independent event, under no influence of ours.” Men are constantly determined to believe according to the evidence that appeareth to them, and the will hath nothing to do with it: and therefore there can be no virtue in believing truth, or fault in rejecting it. And he expressly affirms, “that a determination either right or wrong in matters which are not self-evident, and in which there is any thing of induction or inference, is equally meritorious †.” This is a very convenient plea for infidelity, and so it is for atheism itself: since it proceeds upon this foundation, that men can never be obliged to believe any principles at all in which there is any thing of induction or inference, nor consequently those relating to the existence of God and a providence. And if there be no fault in disbelieving those principles, there can be no fault in refusing to obey, or worship him, which necessarily dependeth upon the belief of his existence. But the foundation this goes upon is manifestly false; as if men were always, and in all cases, determined by mere evidence, and that assent and dissent were therefore necessary acts, and absolutely out of their power. Nothing is more undeniable from common observation and experience, than that the will and affections have a great influence on the judgment; and that we have a great deal of freedom in the right or wrong use of our reasoning faculties, and consequently are liable to praise or blame on that account. Let the proofs that are offered be ever so plain, we may choose whether we will attend to them; or we may turn our eyes from the evidence; or, if we profess to examine, may, through prepossession and wrong dispositions of mind, institute a slight, a partial, and defective examination. Men may be, and often are, so biassed by the influence of affections and interests, as to cause things to appear to them in a quite different light than

\* Christianity not founded on Argument. p. 8.

† Ibid. 17, 18.

otherwise

otherwise they would do. All the world owns, that a candour and simplicity of heart, the love of truth, and a readiness to embrace it when fairly proposed, is a very commendable disposition of mind; and that refusing to receive it through the influence of corrupt affections and passions is really culpable. But this especially holdeth in truths of a religious and moral nature. Our believing or disbelieving them is very much influenced by the good or bad dispositions of our minds, and must have a great effect upon the practice: and therefore in these cases to receive and embrace these truths may be an important duty, and to disbelieve or reject them may be highly criminal: and God may very justly interpose his authority to require the one, and warn men against the other.

The author all along supposeth, that the faith required in the gospel is no more than a bare assent of the understanding, and the unbelief there condemned is a mere speculative dissent. But this is a wrong representation: nothing is more evident than that the faith required in the gospel of those to whom it is made known, that faith to which the promises are made, is a complex thing: it includeth a love of truth, and a disposition to embrace and profess it, which, in the circumstances in which Christianity first appeared, argued a great deal both of candour and fortitude: and it is always represented to be of a vital operative nature, a principle of holy obedience, and which purifieth the heart, and leadeth men to do the will of God, and obey his commands. And such a faith is certainly a virtue, and very properly the subject of a divine command: and the unbelief there condemned is supposed to proceed from men's being under the influence of corrupt affections and prejudices, and from their unwillingness to receive the truth, because their deeds are evil. It is expressed by their *shutting their eyes*, and *hardening their hearts*, lest they should *see with their eyes*, and *understand with their hearts*, and be *converted and healed*. And this certainly argueth a bad and vicious disposition of soul, and leadeth to disobedience; and is therefore very properly forbidden in the divine law.

With regard to human laws, when they are once sufficiently promulgated, it would scarce be accepted as a plea for men's neglecting or breaking those laws, that they are not satisfied that they are the king's laws; and that no man can be justly obliged, under

the restraint of authority and penalties, to assent to this proposition, that these are the king's laws; since assent is not in our own power. It is very probable, that a way would soon be found to over-rule this plea, and convince them that authority could interpose in this matter. In like manner, it seems to be obvious to the common sense and reason of mankind, that if God hath given a revelation or discovery of his will, concerning doctrines and laws of importance to our duty and happiness, and hath caused them to be promulgated with such evidence as he knoweth to be sufficient to convince reasonable and well-disposed minds, that will carefully attend to it, he hath an undoubted right to require those to whom this revelation is published to receive and to obey it. And if, through the influence of corrupt affections and lusts, those to whom this revelation is made known refuse to receive it, he can justly punish them for their culpable neglect, obstinacy, and disobedience. Our author himself, speaking of the spirit's working faith in all men, saith, though in evident contradiction to his own scheme, that "the tender of this conviction, however potent in its influence, may yet depend greatly upon the proper dispositions of our minds to give it a reception for its efficacy; and so far will give place, and afford ample matter of trial and probation, and become indeed a test of our obedience. And that in this case disbelief and guilt have a meaning when put together; since the compliance required is, not a compliance out of our power, nor any longer that of the understanding, but of the will, in its nature free, and therefore accountable; and though we are not by any means chargeable for the effects of our apprehension, yet there is no reason but that we may be with all justice called to the strictest account for our obstinacy, impiety, and perverseness\*."

I shall only take notice of one thing more, and which is indeed the most plausible thing in his whole book, and that is, that the generality of mankind, even of those among whom Christianity is published, cannot be obliged to believe it, because they have not a capacity to discern and judge of the proofs and arguments which are brought for it. But though it should be allowed, that they could not of themselves trace those proofs and evidences;

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 64.

yet there are few but may be made sensible of the force of those proofs and evidences, when set before them by others. And this is sufficient. It is evident to any one that knows mankind, that we are so constituted, as to stand in need of mutual assistance and information, in matters of great consequence to our duty and happiness. Most of the principles of science of every kind are things that must be taught; and there are few that reason out those principles for themselves, but proceed upon them as demonstrated by others, and apply themselves to practise the rules that are founded on those principles. In like manner religion must be taught, or the most of mankind will know but little of it. And if it requireth care and application to understand its doctrines and precepts, and the evidences whereby it is confirmed, this is no argument at all, either against its reasonableness or excellence: for nothing that is truly excellent in knowledge or practice is to be attained to without care and diligence. It is every man's duty in this case to take in what helps and informations he can get: and if we can come to perceive the evidence by the assistance of others, this will answer the purposes of religion as well as if we could do it merely by the force of our own reason without any assistance at all.

It would undoubtedly be a thing above the capacity of the generality of mankind, and what the most learned would not be well fitted for, to trace out all the parts of religion and morality, by a regular deduction from the first principles in a way of abstracted reasoning: and therefore it is a great advantage, that God hath given a clear revelation of his will, containing, in plain and express propositions, the principles and doctrines which are of greatest importance to be known, and the duties which are most necessary to be practised. Such a revelation is set before us in the gospel: and the evident marks of disinterestedness that appear in it, without the least traces of a worldly spirit or design, the purity and excellence of its doctrines and precepts, and the uniform tendency of the whole for promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind, and the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world, furnish arguments obvious to common capacities, that this religion owed not its rise to human policy, to the arts of impostors, or to evil beings, but was of a godlike and heavenly original. And as to historical evidence, persons of com-



mon found understanding may be made sensible, by the help of the learned, that we have all the evidence of the truth of the extraordinary facts, whereby the divine authority of the Christian religion was attested, which can be reasonably desired: That most of those facts were of a public nature, which might have been easily detected and exposed if they had been false; in which case that religion, which had nothing else to support it, and was destitute of all worldly advantages, must have fallen at once. But that this was so far from being the case, that the greatest enemies of Christianity are not able to deny, that, upon the credit of those facts, this religion, though directly opposite to the prejudices which then universally obtained, and though it had the most unfurmountable difficulties to encounter with, and had all the powers of the world engaged against it, soon made a wonderful progress both among Jews and Gentiles; which, as things were circumstanced, cannot otherwise be accounted for, than by admitting the truth of those extraordinary facts: That the original revelation itself, together with an account of those facts, was committed to writing in the very age in which that revelation was first given, and those facts were done; which is a sure method of conveyance, though oral tradition is a very uncertain one: And that these accounts, which were written by persons who were perfectly acquainted with the things they relate, and which have all the characters of purity, artless undisguised simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth, that any writings can possibly have, were in that very age received with great veneration, as of sacred authority. The copies of them were soon spread abroad into many different countries: they were read in the public assemblies, translated into various languages, and they have been ever since so constantly cited and appealed to in every age by persons of different sects and parties, many of whom have transcribed large portions of them into their writings, that it may be justly said, they have been transmitted with a continued evidence, far greater than can be produced for any other books in the world; and that a general corruption of them, if any had attempted it, would have been an impossible thing. There is nothing in all this, but what persons of common sound sense, who are desirous of information, may be sufficiently assured of by the assistance of the learned: and when, besides this, they feel the power and influence

influence of the doctrines and motives proposed in those sacred writings upon their own hearts, comforting them in all the vicissitudes of mortal life, and animating them to all virtue and goodness, this completeth their satisfaction and assurance; especially when it is farther considered, that we are taught in scripture to hope, that God's gracious assistances will not be wanting to those that with honest hearts and upright intentions endeavour to know and do the will of God. *For if any man will do his will, saith our Saviour, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself,* John vii. 17.

Our author, in order to shew that the generality of mankind are incapable of judging of the evidence for Christianity, hath taken upon him to pronounce, that there are few that are capable of reasoning at all, *if there is the least of induction or inference in the case\**. And this, if it proveth that they are under no obligation to believe Christianity, equally proveth, that they are under no obligation to believe natural religion, not even the existence of a God, or a providence; since here there is certainly room for induction and inference. But the truth is, this is a very false and base representation of human nature: it would follow from it, that the generality of men are incapable of moral agency, of virtue and vice, or of being governed by laws: for this supposeth them capable of understanding what these laws are, and what is the duty required of them, and of making inferences and deductions. And with regard to religion, and its proofs and evidences, it can scarce be doubted, that if men applied themselves to it with the same care and diligence that they generally do in matters of much less consequence, they would attain to such a sense of religion and its evidences, as would both make it reasonable for them to believe it, and to govern their practice by it.

There were several good answers published to *Christianity not founded on Argument*. One of the first that appeared was that written by Dr. Doddridge, which I remember to have read with pleasure, but as I have not had an opportunity of seeing it for some years, cannot give a particular account of it. I shall confine myself to those answers which I have now by me.

\* *Christianity not founded on Argument*, p. 17, 18.

The first I shall mention is intitled, *The Reasonableness of the Christian Religion, as delivered in the Scriptures, being an Answer to a late Treatise, intitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument,"* by George Benson, afterwards Dr. Benson, London, 8vo. 1743. This may be regarded not merely as an answer to that pamphlet, but as a good defence of Christianity in general, and so the learned author designed it. It consisteth of three parts. In the first part, after having settled the meaning of the word *faith*, and shewn what that faith is, which the gospel requireth of those to whom it is made known, and to which rewards are there annexed, and that it is really a virtue; and what that unbelief is which is there forbidden and condemned, and that it is really a vice; he goes on to produce some of the principal arguments which prove the truth of the Christian religion. He first considers what are usually called the internal evidences of Christianity, the reasonableness of its doctrines, of its moral precepts, of its positive institutions, and of the sanctions by which it is enforced; and then considers the external evidences arising from prophecy and miracles, particularly from the resurrection of Christ, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost poured forth upon the apostles and first Christians. These things are here set in a fair and agreeable light; and it is also shewn, that the accounts given of these things in the New Testament may be depended on, and that we have sufficient evidence of the truth and authenticity of the gospel records. In the second part a solid answer is given to the several objections and difficulties proposed by the author, with a view to shew that religion cannot be a rational thing. The third part contains a distinct explication of those texts of scripture which he had perverted and misapplied. And there is scarce any one text cited or referred to in his whole book which is not here particularly considered.

Not long after this, there was another valuable answer published, intitled, *The Christian's Faith a rational Assent, in Answer to a Pamphlet, intitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument,"* by Thomas Randolph, D. D. London, 1744. It was published in two parts, and divided into six chapters. In the first, the question in dispute is clearly stated, which is reduced to this: whether the Christian faith be founded on argument, and is ordinarily attainable in a rational way, or is to be acquired only  
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by a particular revelation imparted supernaturally to every individual? And he undertakes, in opposition to the author of that pamphlet, to shew, that the Christian's faith ought to be founded upon the conviction of the understanding, and that it is a rational assent, by which he means, that just and satisfactory reasons may be given for the hope and faith we profess. He considers the nature of assent, and shews, that we are not wholly passive in believing or disbelieving, but have a great compass of liberty in the use of those faculties on which assent depends; and that therefore faith may be a virtue, and argue a good disposition of mind, and unbelief be vicious and criminal. In his second chapter, he fairly examines and clearly confutes the author's arguments drawn from the nature of reason and religion: and in the third, the arguments from scripture, by which he pretends to prove, that we are not to use our understandings in matters of religion. In his fourth chapter, he inquires into the author's own scheme, and the principle of gospel evidence which he has thought fit to assign, which he wholly resolveth into an immediate, infallible, supernatural revelation, darted with an irresistible light into the mind of every particular person: the absurdity of this Dr. Randolph exposes, and answers the pretended proofs brought from scripture in support of it. The fifth chapter contains a good account of the proofs of the Christian religion, with a particular consideration of the objections of this writer against miracles and traditional testimony. Lastly, he takes notice of the reflections thrown out by the author of that pamphlet against the Church of England in particular.

You will probably expect, that I should take some notice of another answer, which appeared about the same time, and which also met with a favourable reception from the public, viz. *Remarks on a late Pamphlet, intitled, "Christianity not founded on Argument."* These remarks, which were drawn up by me at your own desire, were contained in two letters that were published separately, London, 1744. The design of this answer, which was much shorter than either of the former, was not to enter upon a distinct and particular account of the evidences which are usually produced in proof of the Christian religion, which the author of these letters had considered largely on some former occasions, but to represent in a clear and concise manner

the absurdity and ill tendency, as well as manifold inconsistencies, of this writer's scheme; to give a plain confutation of the principal arguments from scripture and reason, by which he has pretended to support it, and to detect and expose his fallacies and misrepresentations.

But it is time to take leave of this writer, whom I have taken the more particular notice of, because some of his objections are managed with great art, and have a specious appearance.

L E T T E R XII.

*The Resurrection of Christ an Article that lies at the Foundation of the Christian Faith—Attacked with great Confidence in a Pamphlet, intitled, The Resurrection of Jesus considered—What this Writer offers to prove, that Christ did not foretel his own Resurrection, and that the Story of the Chief Priests setting a Watch at the Sepulchre is a Forgery and Fiction, examined and confuted—Observations on the extraordinary Way he takes to fix Contradictions on the Evangelists—The Rules by which he would judge of their Accounts would not be endured, if applied to any other Writings—He insists on farther Evidence of Christ's Resurrection; and yet plainly intimates, that no Evidence that could be given would satisfy him—Extravagant Demands of the Deistical Writers on this Head considered—The Evidence that was actually given, the properest that could be given—The seeming Variations among the Evangelists, if rightly considered, furnish a Proof of the Truth and Genuineness of the Gospel Records—An Account of the Answers published to this Author, especially of Mr. West's Observations on the History and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.—Sir George Littleton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul commended.*

SIR,

THE resurrection of Christ is an article of vast importance, which lieth at the foundation of Christianity: if this faileth, the Christian religion cannot be maintained, or may be proved to be false. *If Christ be not risen* (saith St. Paul), *then is our preaching vain, your faith is also vain*, 1 Cor. xv. 14. On the other hand, if this holdeth good, the divine mission and authority of the blessed Founder of our holy religion is established. This is what he himself appealed to, as the great and ultimate proof, which was to convince mankind that he was what he professed himself to be, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. If he had been an artful impostor, it can scarce be supposed that he would have appealed to such a proof as this, which would have been

been the most effectual way he could have taken to detect and expose the vanity of his own pretences, and overturn the whole scheme of his religion: or, if he had been an enthusiast, and was imposed upon by the warmth of his own imagination, to believe that God would indeed raise him from the dead, the event would have effectually shewn the folly and madness of his expectations. And, therefore, since he put the proof of his divine mission upon a thing of so extraordinary a nature, which manifestly exceeded all human power, and was actually enabled to accomplish it, this shews, both that he certainly knew that he was sent of God, and that he really was so. And indeed it cannot be conceived how a more illustrious attestation could possibly have been given to him from heaven, than his resurrection from the dead, in accomplishment of his own prediction, and what followed upon it, his ascension into heaven, and the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, as he himself had promised. This the enemies of our holy religion are sensible of; and therefore, though they have sometimes affected to argue, that, supposing Christ to have really risen from the dead, this would not be a valid proof of the truth of the Christian revelation\*, they have in all ages bent their utmost efforts against it. Celsus employed all his wit and malice to ridicule it: so have others done since: of late Mr. Woolston had distinguished himself this way; and no part of his discourses on the miracles of our Saviour was so much laboured, as that wherein he endeavoured to shew, that the account given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection is a false and incredible story. But the weakness of his objections was clearly shewn in the answers that were made to him; among which *The Trial of the Witnesses*, &c. was especially remarkable, both for the strength of the reasoning, and the ingenious and polite manner of treating the argument. Mr. Woolston himself never attempted to vindicate that part of his Discourses against the answers that had been given to it. But after several years had passed, a bold adventurer appears in a pamphlet, intitled, *The Resurrection of Jesus considered, in Answer to the Trial of the Witnesses, by a Moral Phi-*

\* See a Letter, said to be written by Mr. Collins, to the author of the "Discourse on the Grounds, &c." in answer to Mr. Green's Letters, published in 1726.

*losopher*, London, 1744; so this gentleman thinks proper to stile himself, as Dr. Morgan had done before him. Like that writer, he appears to be of great vivacity, and no small degree of confidence, and to have a high opinion of his own abilities and performances; and, like him, seems resolved to put all the arts of controversy in practice, by which he thinks he might carry his point, without being very solicitous whether they are properly reconcileable to truth or candour. He has with great diligence raked together all that a lively imagination, animated with the most determined malice, could invent or suggest, for misrepresenting and exposing the gospel-history: nor does he, as some others had done, any-where pretend a regard to the religion of Jesus, but all along openly declares against it; in which he is so far to be commended, if he had but acted the part of a fair, as he doth of a professed adversary.

The principal things observable in this treatise, with relation to the declared design of it, the overthrowing the accounts that are given us of the resurrection of Jesus, may be reduced to these three heads: 1. He undertakes to prove, that Christ did not foretel his death and resurrection at all, neither to the Jewish priests and Pharisees, nor to his own disciples: and that all that the evangelists say on this head is mere fiction and forgery. 2. That the whole story of the Jewish priests and rulers setting a watch at the sepulchre, and sealing the stone, is false, and a most absurd and incredible fiction. 3. That the accounts given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection are in every part inconsistent and self-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and imposture. I shall make some observations on each of these; and that I may not return to this subject again, shall take notice, as I go along, of some things advanced by Mr. Chubb, in his posthumous works, to enforce the objections of this writer.

It is of great importance to our author's cause to prove, if he was able to do it, that Jesus did not foretel his own death and resurrection: for if he did foretel it, and it was known that he did so, this makes the precautions taken by the chief priests to prevent an imposition in this matter absolutely necessary; and the whole story is perfectly consistent. Besides that, as hath been already hinted, his foretelling a thing of such a nature, which, if he had been an impostor, he must have known it would  
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be absolutely out of his power to accomplish, and which yet was actually fulfilled, affords the most convincing proof, that he was really that extraordinary and divine person he professed himself to be. Our author saw this, and therefore has made an attempt to shew, that Jesus did not foretel his death and resurrection, neither to the Jewish priests and Pharisees, nor to his own disciples. With regard to the former, it appeareth from the testimony of the evangelists, St. Matthew and St. Luke, that when the Scribes and Pharisees desired Jesus to shew them a *sign from heaven*, he told them, that *no sign should be given, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*. And St. Matthew farther informs us, that he then openly declared to them, that *as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*, Matth. xii. 38, 39, 40. Which plainly supposed, that, in that space of time, he should, after lying in the earth or grave, rise out of it, as Jonas came alive out of the belly of the fish. From this prediction therefore, which was uttered more than once in the hearing of the Scribes and Pharisees, they might gather that he intended to signify that he should rise again from the dead. What this writer hath offered against this is very trifling. Because St. Luke, in mentioning what our Saviour said concerning the sign of the prophet Jonas, doth not expressly take notice of his declaring, that the Son of man should lie three days and nights in the heart of the earth, he pretends that this is a proof that St. Matthew forged it. Whereas all that it proves is, that St. Matthew hath given a fuller relation of what our Saviour said on that occasion, than St. Luke hath done; though what the latter relateth concerning Christ's mentioning the sign of the prophet Jonas, plainly implieth it. He also repeats what Mr. Woolston had urged, that Christ did not lie three days and nights in the grave; of which I took some notice before in my remarks on Mr. Woolston's discourses. He farther hints at what Mr. Chubb, who wrote after our author, and endeavours to reinforce his objections, has enlarged upon for several pages together\*, that Jesus could not have made such a declaration as this, that *no sign should be given to that wicked and adulterous generation, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*;

\* Chubb's posthumous works, vol. i. p. 342—347.

both

both because their being a wicked generation was rather a reason for giving them a sign, since in that case they needed it most, and the design of his coming was to call sinners to repentance; and because in fact Christ did work signs and wonders among them after this. But to take off the force of this, it is sufficient to observe, that by comparing Matth. xvi. 1. Luke xi. 16. Mark viii. 11. it appeareth, that the sign they demanded was a *sign from heaven*, by which they probably meant some glorious appearance in the heavens. They had a little before attributed his miracles to Beelzebub: and now they insisted that he should give them a particular kind of sign; and it was perfectly consistent with his character to refuse to humour them in this demand, which he well knew proceeded from a cavilling temper, and not from minds honestly willing to submit to evidence. But though he refused to give them at that time precisely such a sign as they demanded, he yet both continued to work miracles among them, and referred them to his resurrection, which, taking in the circumstances that attended it, and followed upon it, was, in the fullest and properest sense, a *sign from heaven*, and was sufficient to convince them, if they were disposed to receive conviction. To this it may be added, what St. John informs us of, that in a discourse addressed to a great number of the Jews, among whom were several of his malicious enemies, he plainly spoke of his *laying down his life, and taking it again*, and declared that *this commandment he had received of his father*, John x. 17, 18, 19, 20.

As to his own disciples, under which character others besides the twelve apostles are often comprehended, the author himself acknowledgeth, that the evangelists represent him as having declared to them in plain and express terms, on five different occasions, that he should suffer and die, and rise again on the third day. But because they tell us, that the disciples *did not understand this saying*, and that it was *hid from them*, and that they *questioned among themselves, what this rising from the dead should mean*, he would have the whole pass for forgery and fiction. He thinks it incredible, that twelve men could hear such plain expressions, so clearly foretelling his dying and rising again, and yet not be able to understand them. But this is easily accounted for, considering that the disciples were at that time under the power of those prejudices, which then generally prevailed among

among the Jews, relating to the Messiah. They could not conceive how the Messiah, who, according to their notions of things, was *to abide for ever*, and not die at all\*, could be subject to sufferings and death: nor consequently how he should rise again from the dead. When therefore they heard Jesus, whom they looked upon to be the Messiah, talk of his dying and rising again on the third day, they thought it must be understood in some mystical or figurative sense, and that some meaning which they did not at present comprehend lay hid under those expressions, however plain they might appear: so that this only shews the dulness of their apprehensions, and the force of their prejudices — and at the same time the impartiality of the evangelical historians who have recorded it. But though the disciples could not conceive how Christ should die and rise again on the third day, yet as he so often repeated it on different occasions, without ever giving the least injunction to them to conceal it, it may justly be supposed that the saying got abroad, and was known to many. And this coming to the ears of the Jewish chief-priests and Pharisees, who also knew what he had said to some of the Pharisees and Scribes concerning the sign of the prophet Jonas, was a sufficient foundation to them to say to Pilate, *We remember that that deceiver said* (not that he *said to us*, as this gentleman thinks fit to quote it, but that *he said*), *while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again*. There needed no more to put them upon all proper precautions to prevent an imposture in this matter.

This leads me to take some notice of the second main thing this writer insisteth upon, which is, that the story St. Matthew tells of the chief-priests setting a watch at the sepulchre, and sealing the stone, is a false and absurd fiction. Mr. Woolston had allowed the truth of the story, and built one of his principal arguments against the resurrection of Jesus upon the circumstance of sealing the stone. And this argument was mightily cried up for a while. But our author had the sagacity to discern, that if this was admitted, it would afford a strong presumption of the truth and reality of Christ's resurrection; and therefore thinks it more for the interest of his cause to deny it. The chief thing he urges against the story proceeds upon the supposition, that

\* See John, xii. 34.

Jesus did not foretel his resurrection at all, nor had the Jewish priests and Pharisees heard that he had foretold it; and therefore it is absurd to think they would give themselves concern about it. But the falsehood of this supposition hath been already shewn; nor is there any thing in the whole story, as related by St. Matthew, that is not perfectly consistent, and highly probable. It is very natural to suppose, considering their characters and dispositions, and the circumstances of the case, that they would take the fittest precautions, that the disciples of Jesus might not have it in their power to pretend he was risen from the dead, as it was reported he had foretold: and there could not be a more probable method fixed upon for this purpose, than the setting a watch to guard the sepulchre, and sealing the stone that was rolled to the mouth of it. And though we should allow them to have known, as this writer affirms they did, that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wound up the body in linen and spices, which shewed they did not expect his resurrection, yet they knew he had other disciples; and besides might suspect, that all this preparation for embalming the body, was only the better to cover their design of carrying it away. What he farther urgeth concerning their believing him to have been, what they called him to Pilate, a deceiver, instead of being an argument, as he would have it to be, against their using this precaution, would furnish a strong reason for it: since in that case they might be apt to suspect that his disciples would act the part of deceivers too, and endeavour to carry on the imposture, which therefore they were resolved to prevent. And they might think this one of the most effectual methods they could take to convince the people, many of whom they knew had a high veneration for Jesus, that he was a false prophet, by shewing the falsehood of his prediction, concerning his rising again the third day, which would justify their own conduct in putting him to death.

This author thinks it incredible, that the Jews should bribe the soldiers to be silent, when they themselves must upon their report have been convinced of the truth of the fact. But their conduct on this occasion was no other than might be expected from persons of their character. Whosoever considers their determined malice and envy against Jesus, who had unmasked their hypocrisy, and opposed their traditions; how deeply their repu-  
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putation was engaged, and their authority with the people, as well as that of the Sanhedrim, who claimed to themselves a power of trying prophets, and had condemned him as a false prophet and blasphemer, must be sensible how unwilling they would be to have it thought, that they had wrongfully procured a most excellent person to be crucified, and that they would take all possible methods, by stifling the evidence, to throw off the odium from themselves. To which may be added the power of their prejudices, which would not suffer them to imagine, that a person who had been crucified could possibly be their Messiah, which was absolutely subversive of all their maxims. They who, when they could not deny his miracles, ascribed them to a diabolical power, shewed what they were capable of. And indeed the force of obstinate prejudice, hatred, envy, pride, and a desire of maintaining their own authority, all which concurred in this case, is amazing, and hath often caused persons to stand out against the clearest evidence.

The last thing he hath to offer is, that St. Matthew is the only evangelist who relateth the story of sealing the stone, and placing the watch; but this is of small moment: St. Matthew's relation of it is sufficient. He wrote his gospel, by the consent of all antiquity, the first of the evangelists, in a few years after our Lord's ascension, and designed it especially for the use of the Jewish converts: and his relating this story in a gospel published among the Jews, and so early in that very age when the story must have been fresh in remembrance, and when, if false, it might have been easily contradicted, shews that it was a thing well known, and that he was fully assured of the truth of it, and in no fear of being detected in a falsehood. And what farther confirmeth this, is his referring to a report as current among the Jews at the time when he wrote, concerning the disciples having stolen the body, whilst the soldiers that were set to watch the sepulchre slept. The story indeed was not very consistent; but yet, as the case is circumstanced, it was the best thing they had to say. The body was gone out of the sepulchre; either therefore it must be acknowledged that he rose again from the dead, or that his disciples had taken it away: and this, if done at all, must have been done either with the connivance of the guards that were set to watch it, or when they were asleep: the guards,  
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if charged with having connived at it, and with having been bribed by the disciples, would have been obliged to justify themselves against that charge, and would have told the fact as it really happened: there was nothing therefore left but to pretend that it was done whilst they were asleep. And yet the rulers never pretended to convict the disciples of having stolen the body, nor instituted any process against them on that account; but contented themselves with threatening to punish them if they preached the resurrection of Jesus, which yet they boldly avowed to their faces. As to the author's insinuation, how came St. Matthew to know of the angel's appearing to the soldiers with such circumstances of terror, if they were hired to conceal it; this is easily accounted for: it is only said that *some of the watch* went and told the chief priests, Matth. xxviii. 11. It may therefore be reasonably supposed, that others of them might, immediately after the thing happened, tell it to some other persons: yea, it might probably happen, that some of those who were then hired and bribed might discover it afterwards, when all was over; or that some of the priests, many of whom were afterwards converted to the Christian faith, as we learn from Acts vi. 7. might have known and divulged it.

Thus it appeareth, that this writer's principal objections against this story, and which he insisteth upon as manifest proofs of the absolute falsehood and forgery of the gospel-history, are of no force. And yet he taketh upon him to pronounce, that *it is in all views absurd to suppose, that the Priests and Pharisees should guard against a resurrection, fraudulent or real.*

He next proceeds to inquire how the witnesses agree in their evidence, and endeavoureth to prove, that the accounts the evangelists give of the resurrection of Jesus are in every part inconsistent and self-contradictory, and carry plain marks of fraud and imposture. And here I shall not enter into a distinct examination of the several more minute particulars he insisteth upon, which are all considered and discussed in the answers that were made to him, but shall content myself with some general observations upon his management of the subject: and first I would observe, that he has thought fit to consider the accounts of the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, separately from St. John; whereas they ought all to be taken together, since they all relate

to the same fact of Christ's resurrection: he positively asserteth, that the three evangelists mention in general but three appearances of Jesus; whereas there are plainly seven appearances of Jesus after his resurrection referred to by them, besides two others peculiarly mentioned by St. John: 1. His appearing to Mary Magdalen alone, Mark xvi. 9. John xx. 14, 15, 16, 17. 2. His appearing to the women, Matth. xxviii. 9. 3. His appearing to the two disciples going to Emmaus, Mark xvi. 12. Luke xxiv. 13—32. 4. His appearing to Simon Peter, Luke xxiv. 34. 1 Cor. xv. 5. 5. His appearing to the eleven as they sat at meat on the evening of the day on which he rose, Luke xxiv. 36—43. John xx. 19—23. 6. His appearing to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee, Matth. xxviii. 16, 17. 7. His appearing to his disciples on the day of his ascension, Mark xvi. 19, 20. Luke xxiv. 50, 51, 52. Acts i. 6—11. Besides these, there are two other appearances of Jesus recorded by St. John, which are not taken notice of by the other evangelists: one is, that to the eleven, when St. Thomas was with them, eight days after the first, John xx. 26—29. The other is, that at the sea of Tiberias, to seven of the disciples, John xxi. 1—14. Here are nine distinct appearances pointed out by the evangelists, which were at different times, and are plainly marked out by distinct characters. But this author, in order to have a pretence for charging these writers with contradictions, thinks fit to confound these different appearances: and the different circumstances and variations, which shew that they belong to different appearances, are represented by him as so many inconsistencies in the relation of the same appearance. But by this way of management, instead of proving contradictions upon the evangelists, he only proves his own unfairness and absurdity. Thus, *e. g.* St. Luke relates an appearance of Jesus to his disciples at Jerusalem, on the very evening of the resurrection day; St. Matthew tells of an appearance of his to his disciples at a mountain in Galilee, which must have been some time after. The time and place of these appearances are manifestly different; which should lead every person of candour to regard them as different appearances; but our author is pleased to suppose them to relate to the same appearance, and then chargeth these different circumstances as to time and place, as so many contradictions and inconsistencies. This must be owned

to be a very extraordinary way of proceeding; and at this rate it will be easy to expose the most authentic history that ever was written.

There is another rule frequently made use of by this writer, and upon which his charge of contradictions against the evangelists principally dependeth, and that is, that if any one of them takes notice of any circumstance or event not mentioned by the rest, this is to pass for a proof of fiction and forgery. According to this new rule of criticism, where several historians give an account of the same facts, if some of them relate those facts with more, and some with fewer circumstances, this shall be sufficient absolutely to destroy the credit of the whole; and they that omit a circumstance, or say nothing at all about it, must be looked upon as contradicting those that mention it. Upon this principle, St. Mark and St. Luke are made to contradict one another; because the latter mentions Bethany or mount Olivet as the place from whence Jesus ascended, and the former, in mentioning Christ's ascension, takes no notice of the place from whence he ascended. In like manner it is pretended, that St. Matthew and St. John, in contradiction to the two other evangelists, say, that Jesus never ascended at all, because they give no distinct account of his ascension, though they evidently suppose it; and there are more references to it in St. John's gospel, than in any one of the evangelists: see John vi. 62. vii. 39. xiv. 2. 28. xvi. 7. 16. 28. xvii. 5. 11. xx. 17. So because the last mentioned evangelist is the only one of them that mentions the piercing the side of Jesus with a spear, of which he himself was an eye-witness, and gives an account of some appearances of Jesus to his disciples not mentioned by the other evangelists, this shews, according to our author, that he forged those accounts, and that *his evidence destroys theirs, or they his*; though one design of his writing his gospel was to take notice of things which they had omitted: nor do any of them give the least hint that they proposed distinctly to recount all Christ's appearances.

In order to fix the charge of contradictions and inconsistencies upon the evangelists; he pretendeth, that, according to St. Luke, our Lord ascended the very evening of the day of his resurrection. The only proof he bringeth for so strange an assertion is, that St.



Luke, immediately after having given an account of our Lord's appearing to the eleven disciples, and others with them, Luke xxiv. 36. and which, by comparing ver. 29 and 33, was pretty late in the evening of the day on which he rose, tells us, that he led them out as far as Bethany, where *he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven*, ver. 50, 51. And this he might justly say, though there was an interval of several days between the one and the other; and it is manifest from other accounts there was, and particularly from what St. Luke himself saith in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles. It is plain that he intends here only to give a summary narration; and therefore, after having taken notice of his first appearance to the eleven, the account of which ends at ver. 43, he passeth over the other appearances without a distinct mention; only giving the substance of what Jesus said on some of those occasions, and which he introduces thus, *επι δε αυτων*, which may be thus understood, *he said besides, or moreover, unto them*: and then he proceeds to give a short account of Christ's ascension, and of what followed upon it, which he more distinctly relateth in the book of the Acts.

St. Luke observes, that the women, when they went to the sepulchre, *found not the body of Jesus*, Luke xxiv. 3. This our candid author represents as if he had said, that they never saw Jesus at all after his resurrection, dead or alive; and then would have this, which is a manifest perversion of St. Luke's meaning, pass for a contradiction to the other evangelists, who tell that Jesus was seen of the women after he rose again from the dead. To prove that the other evangelists contradict St. John, he represents St. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as expressly declaring, that Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples *but once* after his resurrection; and yet certain it is, that not one of them says any such thing. Nor do the evangelists any where say, as he affirms they do, that Jesus appeared *but to a very few* after he rose from the dead, which he thinks contradicts the story of the hundred and twenty, and five hundred, mentioned by the author of the Acts and St. Paul. He might as well have pretended, as Mr. Chubb did afterwards, though without offering the least proof to support it, that the word *hundred* in that passage, Acts i. 15. is an interpolation, and that instead of *an hundred and twenty*, it should be read

*we are not sure that the words here are*

read *twenty*\*. Such wretched shifts only discover a fixed resolution not to believe any accounts that should be given.

Our author endeavours to take great advantage, in which he is followed by the last-mentioned writer, of what is told us concerning Christ's appearing to the two disciples going to Emmaus. Because they did not for some time know Jesus, it is argued, that he had not a true body, and that they could not be afterwards sure that it was he: since, if their senses were deceived at first, they might be so afterwards too; and the like may be supposed, as to all Christ's other appearances to his disciples. That the two disciples did not at first know Jesus, is plain from the story: and this may be accounted for in a natural way, if we suppose, that besides some change which there might be in his countenance, occasioned by his sufferings and death, he might on purpose alter the tone of his voice, or have something in his garb, his air and manner, different from what had been usual with him before, or in some other way disguise himself; which seems to be signified, when St. Mark, referring to this, saith, he *appeared in another form*, Mark xvi. 12. And this might hinder them from knowing him, considering how little at that time they expected to see him. Or, if we should suppose, that he employed a miraculous power to prevent their at first knowing him, which was done for a valuable end, that he might have the better opportunity of instructing them in a familiar way in the true meaning of the scriptures relating to the Messiah, his sufferings and glory, and thereby the better prepare them for the discovery he intended afterwards to make of himself; it by no means follows, that, because they were withheld from knowing him for a while, therefore when he fully discovered himself to them, they could not be certain that it was he. It is plain, that they had afterwards such convincing proofs that it was Jesus, as left no room for doubt in their minds. And that very evening he shewed himself again to them, and to the eleven apostles, and others with them; and the more effectually to convince them, shewed them his hands and his feet, and ate and drank before them; and by the proofs which were given them, both on that and other occasions, they had as full evidence of the reality of his risen body, as they could have of any thing

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 378.

that came to them confirmed by the testimony of their senses. And to suppose an extraordinary miraculous power employed all along to deceive them and overrule all their senses, would be to suppose as great a power employed to make them believe a falsehood, *i. e.* to make them believe that Jesus was risen when he was not so, as would have sufficed for the truth of the resurrection; since it would have been as easy for the divine power to have raised his body really from the dead, as to give all those proofs and evidences that were given of a true body without the reality. As to his appearing among them when the *doors were shut*, which is also urged against the truth of his risen body, all that can be fairly concluded from it is, that when the doors were shut, which the evangelist tells us was for fear of the Jews, Jesus came suddenly among them, opening the doors at once by his miraculous power; not that his body passed through the doors by a penetration of dimensions, which is the construction the author puts upon it; for this would have entirely destroyed our Lord's own argument, which he used at that very time to convince them that he had a real body. *Behold (saith he), my hands, and feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me have.* See Luke xxiv. 36. 39. compared with John xx, 19, 20.

It is observable that this writer, in his great eagerness to expose the evangelical accounts, seems not to consider that some of the arguments he hath produced may be turned against him, and prove the contrary to what he produced them for. He frequently lays a mighty stress on those passages which relate to the disciples not having understood our Saviour, when he foretold his resurrection before his death, and to their doubting of his resurrection after it. And yet it is this very thing that gives the greatest force to their testimony. If they had been prepossessed beforehand with a strong belief that he would rise again, or if they had immediately believed that he was risen from the dead upon the first message that was brought to them, it would undoubtedly have been ascribed to the warmth of their imagination, and to a too forward credulity; but as the case is circumstanced, there is no room for this pretence. It is plain, that nothing but the irresistible evidence of their senses brought them to believe at all; and their believing it so firmly at last, so as to be ready  
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to seal their testimony to it with their blood, shews, that they were constrained to believe by an evidence which they could not withstand, and which absolutely removed their doubts, and overcame all their prejudices.

The account given by the evangelists of Christ's resurrection is farther confirmed by the testimony of St. Paul, who mentions his having been seen by Peter, by James, and by the twelve apostles; concerning which he had many opportunities of informing himself from the persons themselves. He also maketh mention of his having been seen of above five hundred brethren at once, and expressly affirms, as a thing he was well assured of, that the greater part of them were alive at the time when he wrote this; and it is not to be doubted, that he had seen and known many of them, to whose living testimonies he could then appeal. These things he refers the Corinthians to in his epistle, as things known to be certainly true, and which could not be contested, and concerning which he himself had spoken to them more at large when he was with them, 1 Cor. xv. 1, 2, 3, &c. And in a dispute which he there maintaineth against some who denied the future resurrection of the dead, he principally argueth from the resurrection of Christ, as a fact so fully proved, that they could not deny it. Yet our author is pleased to reject all this at once, because St. Paul writes by hearsay, *i. e.* because he was not himself present at those appearances, though he had the account from those who were so: and so fond is he of this thought, that he repeats it, as his manner is, in three or four different parts of his book. According to this rule, an historian is not to be credited in any fact of which he himself was not an eye-witness, though he might have undoubted assurance of it; a maxim which would destroy the credit of the best historians now in the world. But one should think this writer would at least allow, that St. Paul ought to be credited, when, after mentioning Christ's having appeared to others, he affirms, that he himself had seen Jesus, 1 Cor. xv. 8. ix. 1. But it seems this also is to be rejected, under pretence that he only saw him in a vision; though it was at noon-day, as he was travelling with several others in his company, and which was attended with such remarkable circumstances, and produced such real effects, that if he could not be sure of this, no man can be certain of any thing that he hears or sees. Mr Chubb indeed, who faithfully treads in our author's steps,

takes upon him to affirm, that St. Paul's testimony weakens, instead of strengthening, the evidence of Christ's resurrection: for which he gives this reason, that though St. Paul had known Jesus before his resurrection, which it doth not appear he did, yet as that glorified body must have been different from what it had appeared to be whilst he was on earth, he could not be a proper judge of the identity of that body with that body which had been crucified\*. But it is to be considered, that what St. Paul was to be convinced of, and of which he himself was afterwards to be a witness, was, that Jesus was raised again, and invested with a divine dominion and glory. And of this the appearing of Jesus to him in the manner he did, as he was going to Damascus, and assuring him by a voice from heaven, that it was Jesus whom he had persecuted who then spoke to him, attended with such amazing displays of a divine glory and splendor, together with the remarkable consequences which then followed upon it, especially the extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers with which he himself was endued, and which he was enabled to confer upon others in the name of a risen Jesus, exhibited the most illustrious and convincing proof and evidence that could possibly be desired, and which absolutely overcame all the strong and obstinate prejudices with which his mind was at that very time possessed. So that all things considered, there never was a testimony which deserved greater regard than that of St. Paul, and accordingly it has justly had the greatest weight in all ages.

I pass by other instances that might be mentioned of our author's great unfairness and disingenuity, particularly his gross perversions of several passages of scripture, and putting a meaning upon them contrary to the plain intention of the writers, with many other things which are fully detected and exposed by his learned answerers. But what is wanting in reasoning, is made up in confidence. He boldly pronounceth, that "the witnesses do not all agree in one circumstance, but palpably contradict one another in every particular; and that such inconsistencies, improbabilities, absurdities, and contradictions, would destroy the credit of other histories;" but he sneeringly adds, "that the faith of this is founded on a rock †." And I believe it

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. 1.

† Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 56, 57, 58.

will hardly be thought too severe a censure to say, that any man who would treat any other historians as this writer hath treated the evangelists, and who would advance such rules of judging concerning any other books whatsoever, as he seems to think fair with regard to theirs, would, instead of passing for a candid and judicious critic, be generally exploded as a malicious and impertinent caviller, that had betrayed a great defect of sense, manners, or honesty.

In my remarks on Mr. Woolston's discourses in the seventh letter, notice was taken of that grand objection, that our Lord ought to have appeared publicly to the chief priests and rulers of the Jews after his resurrection. I shall not repeat what is there offered in answer to it; but shall only observe, that our author has endeavoured to strengthen that objection by pretending, that Jesus had actually engaged to do so: and that "not to appear to the Jews when he had promised it, and put the truth of his mission upon it, was a denying the truth of his mission, and a falsifying his word\*." Thus he represents it, as if the evangelists had said, that Christ promised to appear publicly to the Jews, and particularly to their chief priests and rulers after his resurrection. But this is entirely his own fiction: our Lord made no such promise. He declared indeed, that a sign, like that of the prophet Jonas, should be given to *that evil and adulterous generation, i. e.* that sufficient evidence should be given to convince them of the truth of his resurrection. And such evidence there was given, if their minds had been open to conviction: and vast numbers of the Jews were actually convinced by it. But this writer carrieth it still farther: he thinks Jesus should have shewn himself to the Jews as their deliverer from the Roman yoke, and as their temporal king, that he might prove that he was the Messiah, and fulfil the prophecies.

A reflection occurs to me on this occasion, which you will allow me to mention: It relates to the several demands that have been made by these gentlemen with regard to the evidence, which they pretend ought to have been given to the Jews of our Saviour's resurrection. The author of *Christianity not founded on Argument* thinks, that Jesus ought to have taken one turn in

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 59. 61.

the market place in the presence of all the people, and that "this might have spared both the painful labours and lives of so many holy vouchers\*." Mr. Chubb insists upon it, that when Christ was risen, "he should have repaired to the house of some friend, and made it the place of his residence the time he staid upon earth, that so the rest of his friends, and all others, might know where to see him, and have access to him †." And if he had done so, and been publicly visited, and the people had gathered together in crowds, as might in that case have been expected, this must have awakened the jealousy both of the Jewish chief priests and rulers, and of the Roman government, and might, in the temper the Jews were then in, have probably produced tumults and insurrections, which would have brought a great slur upon Christianity at its first appearance. And so undoubtedly these gentlemen would have had it: for, according to our author, if Jesus had appeared publicly to the Jews after his resurrection, this would not have been sufficient, if he did not also head their armies. And then to be sure this would have been insisted upon as a manifest proof, that the whole scheme of his religion was false, and a mere piece of carnal policy. †

I cannot help thinking upon the whole, that after all the clamour that hath been raised against it, the evidence which was actually given of our Lord's resurrection was the properest that could be given. His making a public personal appearance to the people of the Jews would have been on many accounts improper, and might probably have had bad consequences. But besides the evidence arising from the testimony of the soldiers, who had been set to watch the sepulchre, which was well known to the chief priests, and, notwithstanding all their precautions, had come to the knowledge of others too; besides this, his appearing, in the manner he did, to a considerable number of persons, who had been immediately acquainted with him, to whom he frequently shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs during the course of forty days; his ascending afterwards into heaven in their sight, and the effusion of the Holy Ghost in his extraordinary miraculous gifts and powers, as he himself had

\* Christianity not founded on Argument, p. 68.

† Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. 1.

promised,

promised, upon his disciples, the authorized witnesses of his resurrection, which was done in the most public manner possible, before many thousands of persons of all nations, which were then assembled at Jerusalem; all this, with the following divine attestations that were given them, to confirm their testimony wherever they went, preaching the gospel for many years together, to which testimony they unalterably adhered, in opposition to the greatest sufferings and persecutions to which it exposed them; all this taken together furnished the most proper and convincing evidence, not only of Christ's resurrection, but of his exaltation to glory. And accordingly we find in fact, that his resurrection was accompanied with such proof and evidence, as convinced many myriads (for so it should be rendered) of the Jewish nation, and among them *great numbers of the priests*, Acts vi. 7. xxi. 20. and brought them over, contrary to all their prejudices, to acknowledge one that had been crucified by the heads of their own nation for their Messiah, their Saviour, and their Lord; and afterwards convinced vast numbers of the Gentiles, and gained them over to a religion the most opposite that could be imagined, not only to their prejudices and superstitions, but to their vices, and which exposed its professors to the most grievous reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings.

But to return to our author:—Whosoever carefully considers and compares what he hath offered may easily perceive, that, whatever pretences he may make of demanding other and farther evidence of Christ's resurrection than was given, no evidence that could have been given of it would have satisfied him. If Jesus had shewn himself alive, not only to the Jewish rulers, but to every single person of the Jewish nation, he would have been as far from believing it as he is now: for he intimates, that it would be necessary that Christ should appear again in every age, and every country, and to every particular person; and that all the miracles should be wrought over again\*: And even this, upon his principles, would not be sufficient; for he lets us know more than once, that in these cases we are not to trust our own eyesight. He roundly asserteth, that "every miracle is an absurdity to common sense and understanding, and con-

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 62.



“trary to all the attributes of God\*.” And that “pretended facts; which are contrary to nature, can have no natural evidence; and that these facts cannot be admitted on any evidence, because they in their own nature exclude all evidence, and allow of no possible proof†. This point he hath laboured for several pages together, where he strongly asserteth (for I do not find that he bringeth any thing that can be properly called a proof), that miracles are impossible. And he had better have stuck entirely to this, since if he could but have proved it, he might have saved himself the trouble of writing the rest of his book.

There is another extraordinary passage in this writer, which deserves to have a particular notice taken of it. After having treated the account given by St. John of the piercing of Christ's side with a spear, and of which he himself was an eye-witness, as a fiction, for no other reason but because the other evangelists do not mention it; he insinuates, that if his side was not thus pierced, he might not *be really dead when he was put into the sepulchre*; and then no wonder that *he rose again*‡. Thus it comes out, that he doubteth even of the death of Jesus, which neither Jews nor heathens ever doubted of. Was there ever a more obstinate or unreasonable incredulity? He might as well doubt, whether there ever was such a person as Jesus, or his apostles, or whether ever the Christian religion was propagated in the world at all. And indeed if, as he affirms, the resurrection of Christ was *the most incredible story that could be told*, and the evidence that was given for it was *the worst evidence that could be given*§, he might have argued more plausibly than he hath done in most other cases, that it was impossible, as the case was circumstanced, that such a silly story should ever make its way into the world, either among Jews or Gentiles, considering the religion that was founded upon it was absolutely contrary to their most prevailing prejudices, and had no worldly advantages on its side, but all the powers of the world engaged against it: that therefore it is absurd to suppose that Christianity made any progress at all in the first ages, though there is no fact of which we have fuller evidence. And then he would only have

\* Resurrection of Jesus considered, p. 51, 52.

† Ibid. p. 73, 74.

‡ Ibid. p. 50.

§ Ibid. p. 67.

one step to advance farther, and which is indeed the natural consequence of this, and that is, to doubt whether there is any such thing as the religion of Jesus, or any persons in the world that now profess it.

I shall conclude my remarks upon this writer with observing, that the very variations among the evangelists, which he produceth as so many contradictions, do really confirm the truth of the main facts. What he seemeth to insist upon is, that every one of them should tell all the same facts, in the same order and manner, and with the same circumstances, neither more nor less; and that no one of them should mention any thing which is not related by all the rest. And if they had done so, then no doubt this would have been improved as a plain argument, that the whole was a concerted fiction; and that to derive a credit to it, it was pretended to have been written and published by four different persons at different times, whereas these four pretended historians were really but one historian, or, if they were different, they only transcribed one another. But as the case now stands with the evangelists, there is a harmony in the main facts, and in the substance of Christ's discourses: and yet at the same time there is a considerable variety in the order and manner of their narration: such a variety as plainly sheweth these accounts to have been written by different historians, not copied from one another; and that they did not write by concert, in which case they would have been more careful to shun all appearance of contradiction. They write with an unaffected simplicity, and with a confidence of truth, as becometh those that were fully assured of what they relate: each writeth what he knew best, or what he thought properest to take notice of: and yet notwithstanding the seeming variations in the order of their narration, and that some facts, or circumstances of facts, are taken notice of by some of them which are not mentioned by others, it will be found, if narrowly examined, that there is no contradiction between them, and that their accounts may be fairly reconciled. And it is to be hoped, that this author's attempt to expose their authority, however ill intended, will only tend to strengthen it; since though his malice and prejudice are very apparent, and though it is plain that he came to examine their accounts, not with a calm, impartial, and dispassionate temper of mind, but with a resolution,  
if

if possible, to find out absurdities and contradictions in them; yet he has not been able to make good the charge. It turns out, that they are perfectly consistent, and that their seeming contradictions admit of a just reconciliation.

I have been carried farther than I at first intended in making observations upon this pamphlet, which gives a true sample of the deistical spirit, and may be regarded as one of the boldest and openest attacks that was ever made upon that grand article of the Christian faith, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I have been the larger and more particular in my remarks upon it, both because of the importance of the subject, which concerneth the very foundation of our holy religion, and because I thought it might be of use to take this occasion to obviate some of the most plausible objections that have been urged against it. And what hath been here offered may equally serve to take off the force of that part of Mr. Chubb's posthumous works which relates to the same point, and which he hath very much laboured.

But though this letter may seem already to have exceeded its due bounds, it will be necessary, according to the method I have hitherto pursued, to take notice of the answers that were made to this book. Dr. Samuel Chandler, who had on some former occasions appeared to great advantage in the defence of Christianity, published on this occasion a valuable treatise, intitled, *The Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus re-examined, and their Testimony proved entirely consistent*, London, 1744. It is divided into eight chapters. In the first, it is shewn, that the sufferings and glory of Christ were foretold by the ancient prophets. In the second, that Christ plainly foretold his own sufferings and death, and resurrection to his own disciples. In the third, that he declared his death and resurrection publicly to the Jews. In the fourth, it is proved, that the Jewish rulers and Pharisees procured a guard to be set on the sepulchre of Jesus; and a solid answer is returned to the author's objections against it. The fifth chapter relateth to the appearance of the angels to the soldiers; the propriety of which is vindicated against his exceptions. The sixth chapter is concerning the appearances of the angels to the women after the resurrection. The seventh treats of the several appearances of Christ to the women and to his disciples; and this author's charge of inconsistencies in the evangelic accounts is distinctly

distinctly considered. In the eighth chapter, Dr. Chandler concludes with summing up the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, which he hath done with great clearness and judgment.

About the same time there was another answer published by a learned and ingenious but anonymous author, which is intitled, *The Evidence of the Resurrection cleared, in Answer to "The Resurrection of Jesus considered."* He follows the author of that pamphlet closely, and shews, that he grossly misrepresents the arguments in the *Trial of the Witnesses*, which he undertakes to answer, and that he uses the evangelists still worse. The things which we have mentioned, as taken notice of by Dr. Chandler, are also considered by this writer: particularly it is clearly proved, that Christ foretold his death and resurrection, both to his own disciples and to the Jews: and the author's reasoning and exceptions against the story of setting the guard, and sealing the stone, are shown to be vain and groundless. The accounts given by the evangelists of the appearances of the angels to the women, and of Christ to them and to the disciples, are distinctly considered; and the seeming variations, which the author pretends to be so many contradictions, are accounted for, though in a way somewhat different from Dr. Chandler. The solutions of these difficulties proposed by each of these learned writers, are very ingenious, and may suffice to obviate the charge of contradictions the author hath brought against the evangelists; but some of them are judged not to be quite so clear and natural, as those afterwards given by Mr. West. This anonymous writer concludes with a distinct examination of what the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus considered* had offered against miracles in general. He hath clearly and judiciously exposed the weakness and fallacy of those reasonings, whereby that author pretendeth to prove, that miracles are impossible both in a physical and moral sense; that they are contrary to God's immutability; that they are perfectly needless, and answer no valuable end at all; and that if they were once necessary, they would be always necessary. Besides the two answers above-mentioned, there was another then published, which I have not seen, and of which therefore I cannot give a particular account, though from the character I have heard of it, as well as from the known abilities of the author, I make no doubt of its being well executed: it is intitled, *An Address to Deists,*  
being

being a Proof of Revealed Religion from Miracles and Prophecies, in Answer to a Book intituled, "The Resurrection of Jesus considered, by John Jackson, Rector of Roslington, London, 8vo, 1744.

Some time after, there was another book published, which was also occasioned by *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*, and which particularly engaged the attention of the public, both by its own excellence, and because the author of it was a lay-man: it is intituled, *Observations on the History and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, by Gilbert West, Esquire, London, 1747. He very justly commends the two learned and ingenious answers above-mentioned, as containing a solid confutation of many objections against Christianity advanced by the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*; but declares himself not to have been so fully satisfied with the manner of their clearing the sacred writers from the contradictions charged upon them. This put him upon examining the scriptures themselves, and comparing the several accounts of the evangelists with each other, which he hath done with great exactness: and the result of his inquiries was, that by carefully distinguishing the different appearances and events recorded by the evangelists, several of which had been hitherto confounded, he hath happily removed the difficulties and inconsistencies charged upon them, and hath taken away the very foundation of the principal objections that have been so often repeated almost from the beginning of Christianity to this day. I shall not enter upon the particulars of his scheme, which may be seen with great advantage in his book. I shall only observe, that he hath not made use of strained and arbitrary suppositions, but such as seem clearly to arise from the accounts of the evangelists, carefully considered and compared.

By comparing the several parts of the history together, he hath made it to appear, that the women came at different times to the sepulchre, and in different companies, and not all at once, as many have supposed; that there were several distinct appearances of angels, of which he reckons three, besides that to the Roman soldiers, viz. to the other Mary and Salome, to Mary Magdalene, to Joanna and others with her; that these several facts were reported to the apostles at different times, and by different persons; that there were two distinct appearances of Christ to the  
women;

women; one of which was to Mary Magdalene alone, the other to the other Mary and Salome; that St. Peter was twice at the sepulchre, once with St. John, after the first report by Mary Magdalene, concerning the body's not being found in the sepulchre; the second time after the report made by Joanna, and the women with her, of the appearing of the angels to them. He observes, that Christian writers, dazzled by some few points of resemblance, have confounded these different facts, and thereby given great advantage to the infidel: whereas, the facts being rightly distinguished, all the objections against this part of the gospel history, as contradictory and inconsistent, entirely vanish; and it appeareth, that the evangelists, instead of clashing and disagreeing, mutually confirm, illustrate, and support each other's evidence.

This learned gentleman hath made excellent and judicious reflections upon the several incidents in the history of the resurrection, and upon the order in which they happened, and in which the several proofs of the resurrection were laid before the apostles. He shews, that the discovery of it which was made to them was wisely-ordered to be gradual; and that as they were to be the chosen witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, there was a great propriety in the several steps that were taken to give them the highest conviction of it. There is a train of witnesses, a succession of miraculous events, mutually strengthening and illustrating each other, equally and jointly concurring to prove one and the same fact. And whereas their doubting and unbelief, spoken of by the evangelists, seem principally to have consisted in this, that though they might believe that Christ had appeared to those who declared they had seen him, yet they did not believe that he had appeared to them with a real body, therefore, in condescension to their infirmity, he gave them the fullest evidence of the reality of his bodily appearance.

The proofs of Christ's resurrection laid before the apostles are digested by Mr. West under four heads. 1. The testimony of those that had seen him after he was risen. 2. The evidence of their own senses. 3. The accomplishment of the words he had spoken to them, while he was yet with them. 4. The fulfilling of the things which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning him; of which Mr. West hath given a judicious summary.

Upon recapitulating the several particulars which constitute the evidence of the resurrection, he concludes, that never was there any fact more fully proved than the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and that those who were appointed to be the witnesses of it had every kind of proof that in the like circumstances the most scrupulous could demand, or the most incredulous imagine.

Having considered the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as they were laid before the apostles, he proceeds to consider some of the arguments that may induce us, at this distance of time, to believe that Christ rose from the dead; and these he reduceth to two principal heads: The testimony of the chosen witnesses of the resurrection recorded in the scriptures: and the existence of the Christian religion.

With regard to the former, he sheweth, that the apostles and evangelists had the two qualities necessary to establish the credit of a witness, a perfect knowledge of the facts he gives testimony to, and a fair unblemished character; and that their testimony is transmitted down in writings either penned by themselves, or authorized by their inspection and approbation. He offereth several considerations to shew the genuineness of those writings, and takes notice both of the internal marks of the veracity of the sacred writers, observable in the scriptures, and of the external proofs of their veracity and inspiration; especially the exact accomplishment of the prophecies recorded in those writings. He instances in those relating to the different states of Jews and Gentiles, different not only from each other, but from that in which both were at the time when those prophecies were written. He observes, that there are several particulars relating to the condition of the Jewish nation, which were most expressly foretold; as the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the signs preceding that destruction; the miseries of the Jews before, at, and after the famous siege of that city; the general dispersion of that people, the duration of their calamity, and their wonderful preservation under it; and finally, their restoration. And since the other parts of these predictions have been exactly accomplished, there is great reason to think, the last will be so too in the proper season.

He concludes the whole with the argument drawn from the present existence of the Christian religion; and sheweth, that, without supposing the truth of Christ's resurrection, there is no accounting

accounting for the propagation and present existence of Christianity in so many regions of the world. To set this in a proper light, he representeth, in an elegant and striking manner, the great difficulties this religion had to struggle with at its first appearance, and the inabilities of its first preachers, humanly speaking, to oppose and overcome those obstacles. They had the superstition and prejudices of the Jews to encounter with; and at the same time, religion, custom, law, policy, pride, interest, vice, and even philosophy, united the heathen world against Christianity. Its opposers were possessed of all the wisdom, power, and authority of the world: the preachers of it were weak and contemptible; yet it triumphed over all opposition. And this, as the case was circumstanced, affordeth a manifest proof of a divine interposition, and of the truth of the extraordinary facts by which it was supported; the principal of which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thus have I endeavoured to give some idea of this excellent performance, and have been the more particular in my account of it, because a work of this kind, done by a lay-man, is apt to be more taken notice of and received with less prejudice: and for the same reason, though it does not come so directly within my present design, I hope you will indulge me in giving some account of a short, but justly admired, treatise which appeared soon after, and was also written by a learned lay-man, Sir George Littleton. It is intitled, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, in a Letter to Gilbert West, Esquire, London, 1747.* The great advantage of this performance is, that the evidence for Christianity is here drawn to one point of view, for the use of those who will not attend to a long series of argument. The design is to shew, that the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul, alone considered, is of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation. This design is very happily executed. He first considereth the account St. Paul himself hath given of the miraculous manner of his conversion; and thence argueth, that it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself either was an impostor, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast, who by the force of an over-heated imagination imposed on himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others;



or lastly, what he declared to be the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation. That he was not an impostor, he proves, by shewing, with admirable clearness and strength, that he could have no rational motive to undertake such an imposture; nor could possibly have carried it on with any success by the means we know he employed. With equal evidence he sheweth that St. Paul was not an enthusiast; that he had not those dispositions which are essential ingredients in that character; and that he could not possibly have imposed on himself by any power of enthusiasm, either with regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances which he bears testimony to in his Epistles; especially the miracles wrought by him, and the extraordinary gifts conferred upon him, and upon the Christian converts to whom he wrote. To suppose all this to have been only owing to the strength of his own imagination, when there was in reality no such thing at all, is to suppose him to have been all this time quite out of his senses: and then it is absolutely impossible to account, how such a distempered enthusiast and madman could make such a progress, as we know he did, in converting the Gentile world. He next proceeds to shew, that St. Paul was not deceived by the fraud of others; if the disciples of Christ could have conceived so strange a thought as that of turning his persecutor into his apostle, they could not possibly have effected it in the manner in which it was effected, with the extraordinary consequences that followed upon it. It is evident then, that what he said of himself could not be imputed to the deceit of others, no more than to wilful imposture, or enthusiasm: and then it followeth, that what he relateth to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation. He concludeth with some good observations to shew, that the mysteries of the Christian religion do not furnish any just reason for rejecting the strong and convincing evidence with which it is attended: that there are several incomprehensible difficulties in deism itself; such as those relating to the origin of moral evil, the reconciling the prescience of God with the free-will of man, which Mr. Locke owns he could

not do, though he acknowledged both, the creation of the world in time, or the eternal production of it. And yet no wise man, because of these difficulties, would deny the being, the attributes, or the providence of God.

But it is time to conclude this long epistle; and here I intended, as you know, to have closed my accounts of the deistical writers. But as you insist upon it, that, in order to complete this design, it will be necessary to take a more particular notice than I have done of Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, this will engage me to continue my correspondence on this head for some time longer.

## L E T T E R   X I I I .

*An Account of Mr. Chubb's Posthumous Works; his specious Professions, and the advantageous Character he gives of his own Writings—He doth not allow a particular Providence, or that Prayer to God is a Duty—His Uncertainty and Inconsistency with Respect to a future State of Existence, and a future Judgment—He absolutely rejects the Jewish Revelation—His Objections against it briefly obviated—He expresses a good Opinion of Mahometanism, and will not allow that it was propagated by the Sword—He seems to acknowledge Christ's divine Mission, and sometimes gives a favourable Account of Christianity; but it is shewn, that he hath done all he can to weaken and expose it, and to subvert its Credit and divine Authority.*

S I R,

**A**MONG the deistical writers of this present age, Mr. Chubb made no inconsiderable figure. He was, though not a man of learning, regarded by many as a person of strong natural parts and acuteness, and who had a clear manner of expression. He was the author of a great number of tracts, in some of which he put on the appearance of a friend to Christianity; though it was no difficult matter to discern that his true intention was to betray it. One of the most remarkable of these tracts was his *True Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted*; in which, under pretence of asserting the gospel of Christ in its genuine simplicity, he really endeavoured to subvert and expose it. This was answered by Mr. Joseph Hallet, in a valuable tract, intitled, *The consistency of Christian; being a Confutation of the Errors advanced in Mr. Chubb's Book, intitled, "The true Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted, relating to the Necessity of Faith, the Nature of the Gospel, the Inspiration of the Apostles, &c." with Remarks on his Dissertation on Providence: 8vo. 1738.* Another noted tract of Mr. Chubb's was, his *Discourse on Miracles*, in which he proposed to give a representation of the various reasonings that relate to the subject of miracles. But it is manifest, that his intention was not to clear but to perplex the subject; and to shew, that the  
proof

proof from miracles is not at all to be depended upon. To this there was a solid and full answer returned by Mr. Abraham Le Moine, which was published at London, 8vo, 1747. Several of Mr. Chubb's tracts were also answered by Mr. Caleb Fleming; but his answers I have not seen. What I propose to consider are those that are called his *Posthumous Works*, some of which were printed in his own life-time, and the rest carefully corrected and prepared by himself for the press, and published after his death, in two volumes, 8vo, London, 1748. The first volume begins with a short tract, intitled, *Remarks on the Scriptures*. But the far greater part of this volume, and the entire second volume, is taken up with what is called "The Author's Farewell to his Readers, comprehending a variety of Tracts on the most important subjects of religion." It is divided into eleven large sections; and the principal design he appears to have had in view is, to destroy, as far as in him lay, the credit and authority of the Christian revelation. I know of no answer that has been published to this book, and therefore shall be more particular in my remarks upon it, to obviate in some measure the mischief it is fitted to produce,

It is plain from several hints which he hath given us, that he looked upon himself to be a writer of no small importance. He declares, that he hath treated the several subjects he has *discussed* with *plainness and freedom*, and of course must have ministered to the pleasure of the intelligent part of mankind, whether they approved his sentiments, or not\*. He begins the first section of what he calls his *Farewell to his Readers*, with expressing his hope, that his "correspondence with them by writing for many years past, has been not altogether useless nor unacceptable to them †." And in the last section of his *Farewell*, which he calls his *Conclusion*, he expresseth himself as one that in these his last writings was leaving a very valuable legacy to the world. I know few authors, who have taken leave of their readers with a greater air of solemnity than he has done. He calls God to witness to the goodness of his intentions; and declares, that in what he has offered to the world, he has "appealed to the understanding, and not to the passions of men ‡": That "with sincerity

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 64, 65.

† Ibid. p. 97.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 354, 355.

“ and truth he can say, he has had a real concern and regard to  
 “ the present well-being of his fellow-creatures, as well as to their  
 “ future happiness:” And that as he was “ in the decline of  
 “ life, and perhaps not far from the conclusion of it, and being  
 “ in the full exercise of his intellectual faculties, which are not  
 “ in the least clouded or impaired, he chose to take his leave of  
 “ the world as a writer, hoping, that what he has offered to public  
 “ consideration has had, and may have, some good effect upon  
 “ the minds and lives of his readers\*.” And he concludes the  
 whole with again assuring his readers, that he has laid before  
 them, in the *plainest manner* he was able, both in this discourse,  
 and in what he had before published to the world, *those truths*  
 which he thought to be of *the highest importance*. And so, saith  
 he, “ I bid you farewell. hoping to be a sharer with you of the  
 “ divine favour, in that peaceful and happy state, which God  
 “ hath prepared for the virtuous and faithful, in some other fu-  
 “ ture world.”

Who that considers these solemn professions, would be apt to  
 suspect, that this very author, in these his farewell discourses, has  
 not only used his utmost efforts to expose Christianity and the  
 holy Scriptures, but has endeavoured to weaken some of the most  
 important principles of natural religion?

He had, in one of his tracts formerly published, shewn him-  
 self to be no friend to the doctrine of a particular providence;  
 and there are several passages in his *Posthumous Works*, which  
 look that way. He plainly intimates, that he looks upon God  
 as having nothing now to do with the good or evil that is done  
 among mankind †; and that men's natural abilities or endow-  
 ments of body or mind, their fortunes, situation in the world  
 and other circumstances or advantages by which one man is dis-  
 tinguished from another, are things that entirely depend upon se-  
 cond causes, and in which providence does not interpose at all ‡  
 And when he endeavours to shew, that no proof can be brought  
 for a future state from the present unequal distribution of things  
 his argument amounteth in effect to this, that providence hath  
 nothing to do with these present inequalities, nor concerneth it-  
 self with some men's being in a prosperous condition or circum-

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 357. 359. 361.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 127.

‡ Ibid. p. 225.

stances,

stances, and others in a calamitous or suffering state\*. He evidently supposeth all along, that God doth not interpose in any thing where second causes are concerned †: So that all agency of divine providence in disposing, governing, and overruling second causes, in which so much of the wisdom of God's providential administrations doth consist, is upon his scheme absolutely excluded.

Agreeably to this, he discardeth all hope or expectation of divine assistance in the practice of that which is good; though he owns, that something of this kind hath been generally believed in all religions. This is the design of a considerable part of the first section of his *Farewell to his Readers* ‡; which would deserve to be particularly examined, if this were a proper place for it. I shall only observe, that what he seems to lay a principal stress upon, to set aside the notion of divine influences or assistances, is, that we have no way of certainly distinguishing them from the operations of our own minds; whereas, supposing this to be the case, all that it would prove is, not that there are no gracious assistances or influences communicated at all, but that they are ordinarily communicated in a way perfectly agreeable to the just order of our faculties, and without putting any unnatural constraint upon them.

And as he allows no particular interposition of divine providence in human affairs; it is not to be wondered at, that he has done what he can to shew, that prayer to God is no part of natural religion §. He supposeth it as a thing certain, that God doth not fulfil our requests by granting what we pray for, since things will go on in their natural course, whether we pray to God or not. He owns indeed, that prayer, considered as a *positive institution*, may be of use, by *introducing proper reflections, and thereby proper affections and actions*; and provided it be made use of only for this purpose, without expecting to obtain any thing from God in consequence of it, he thinks it cannot be said to be a *mocking of God*: but yet he apprehends that even in this

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 394, 395.

† See concerning a particular providence, Woolaston's Religion of Nature delineated, p. 98, & seq.

‡ Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 114, & seq. § Ibid. p. 287, &c. case,

case, there is still an impropriety in it, and puts the question, whether such an impropriety should be *a bar to prayer*, or whether it be *displeasing to God*; and he plainly intimates, that in his opinion it is so\*. I need not take particular notice of the objections he hath urged against the duty of prayer, which have been often sufficiently obviated†; but I think it is evident, that there is little room left, upon this author's scheme, for what hath been hitherto looked upon by the wisest and best of men to be a principal part of true piety, or of the duty we owe to God, *viz.* a constant religious dependence upon his wise and good providence, a thankful sense of his goodness, and gratitude to him for the benefits we receive, a patient submission and resignation to his will under afflictions, an ingenuous trust and affiance in him, and a looking up to him for his gracious assistances to help our sincere endeavours.

The doctrines concerning the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions, are justly regarded as important parts of natural religion, and have been acknowledged to be so by some of the deists themselves. Mr. Blount, in a letter to the right honourable and most ingenious Strephon, in the *Oracles of Reason*, says, "There are many arguments from reason and philosophy to prove the immortality of the soul, together with its rewards and punishments; but that there is no argument of greater weight with him, than the absolute necessity and convenience that it should be so, as well to complete the justice of God, as to perfect the happiness of man, not only in this world, but in that which is to come." Another deistical writer observes, that "to say, man's soul dies with the body is a desperate conclusion, which saps the foundation of human happiness‡." And one would think, by some passages in Mr. Chubb's book, that he was of the same opinion. He begins the first section of his *Farewell* with assuring his readers, that what he hath *principally aimed at in all his writings*, has been both to *evinced*, and to *impress deeply upon their minds*, a just sense of those truths, which are of the highest concern to them: and one

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, p. 283, 284.

† See particularly Religion of Nature delineated, p. 125, 126. and especially Benson's ingenious tract On the End and Design of Prayer.

‡ Letter to the Deists, p. 25. cited by Halyburton.

of those truths which he there expressly mentions is this, "that God will reward or punish men in another world, according as they have by their good or bad behaviour, rendered themselves the proper objects of either in this \*." He repeats this again in very strong expressions at the end of his tenth section, where he proposes to set before the reader, the *sum total*, as he expresseth it, of his principles †: and again, in what he calls his conclusion, he speaks of God's calling our species to an account for their practice and behaviour, "at which tribunal," saith he, "he will most certainly deal with me, and the rest of mankind, in justice and equity, according to the truth and reality of our respective cases." And in the very last words of his *Farewell to his Readers*, which I cited before, he declares his hope "to be a sharer with them of the divine favour in that peaceful and happy state, which God had prepared for the virtuous and faithful, in some other future world ‡."

And yet, notwithstanding these express and repeated declarations concerning a future state of existence, and a future judgment and retribution, he hath taken pains to unsettle the minds of men in these important points.

In his fourth section, in which he professedly inquircth concerning a future state of existence to men, he representeth it as absolutely doubtful, whether the soul be material or immaterial; whether it be distinct from the body; and, if it be, whether it is equally perishable as the body, and shall die with it, or shall subsist after the dissolution of the body. These are points which, he says, he cannot possibly determine, because he has nothing to ground such determination upon; and at the same time he declareth, that "if the soul be perishable with the body, there can surely be no place for argument with regard to a future state of existence to men, or a future retribution, because when the human frame is once dissolved by death, then man ceases to be, and is no more §." In what follows, he declares himself quite unsatisfied with the arguments which are brought to prove, that the soul is not material, or that matter is not capable of in-

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 97. 99.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 348, 349.

‡ Ibid. p. 355.

§ Ibid. vol. i. p. 312, 313.



telligence; and though he doth not take upon him expressly to determine that point, it is easy to see that he inclineth most to the materialists\*: and after having declared, that the philosophical arguments and reasonings on this head are too abstract and subtle for him to understand, and that therefore he cannot form any judgment about them, nor draw any conclusion from them, he adds, that divine revelation does not afford a proper ground of certainty with respect to man's future existence, because we cannot come to any certainty with regard to the divine original of any external revelation†. He finds fault with St. Paul for saying, that *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*, and will not allow that the resurrection of Christ, supposing it true, though he takes a great deal of pains to shew that it is not so, proves either the possibility or certainty of a resurrection and a future state‡. Thus it appears, that, in this section, where he professedly treateth of a future state of existence to men, he does all he can to render it absolutely uncertain, and to shew that no proof can be given of it, either from reason or revelation: and yet, that he may make a shew of saying something, he concludes this section with observing, that from man's being an accountable creature, there arises a probability, that there will be a future state of existence to men: the farther consideration of which he reserves for the following section, which is concerning a future judgment and retribution.

In this therefore, which is his fifth section, the reader might perhaps expect some determination of this point; and yet, though this is a pretty long section, the proper subject of which is the future judgment, it is managed in such a manner, as to leave the reader at an uncertainty about it, and as much at a loss as before. He begins indeed with observing, that "man, by his faculties and endowments, is an accountable creature, accountable for his behaviour to all whom it may concern, namely, to the intelligent world, and also to the Deity, who is the most perfect intelligence§." But he absolutely discards the proof that is drawn from the present unequal distributions of divine providence. This argument he states very unfairly, and endea-

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 317, 318. 324. 326.

† Ibid. p. 327, 328.

‡ Ibid. p. 333, & seq.

§ Ibid. p. 387.

vours to place it in a ridiculous light. ~ He compares men's different conditions here on earth to that of horses, some of whom meet with bad masters, and others happen to have good ones; and pretends, the argument would equally conclude for a future retribution with regard to all other animals, as it does for the species of mankind\*: but, admitting there will be a future retribution, he thinks it may be doubted, whether it shall be universally extended to all our species. He plainly intimates, that, in his opinion, those who die in their youth will not be called into judgment, nor those who act a very low part in life; and he seems to think, that those only shall be called to an account whose lives have been of much greater consequence to the world, and who have been greatly subservient to the public good, or hurt of mankind†: So that, according to his representation of the case, supposing there were to be a future judgment and retribution, it is what the generality of mankind would have little concern in. And as, upon his scheme, there are but few who shall be called to an account, so it is but for some particular actions that they shall be accountable. He observes, that no man ever intended to do dishonour to God, or to be injurious to him, however foolishly they may have used the names or terms by which the Deity is characterized; and that therefore there will be no inquiry at the last judgment about such offences as these; *i. e.* about blasphemies against God. The only offence man can be guilty of against God is, he thinks, the want of a just sense of his kindness and beneficence, and the not making a public profession of gratitude to him: but whether this will make a part of the grand inquest, he declares himself certainly unable to judge; and he plainly insinuates, that in his opinion it will not; since “among men it has been looked upon to be a mark of greatness of soul, rather to despise and overlook such ingratitude, than to shew any resentment of it‡.” The only thing, therefore, for which he supposes men shall be accountable, is for the injuries or benefits they do to one another: and even as to these, he seems not to allow, that the good or evil particular persons do to one another, will come into judgment, but only “the good or

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 395.

† Ibid. p. 400.

‡ Ibid. p. 391, 392.

“ bad

“ bad part men act, by voluntarily contributing to the good or hurt  
 “ of the commonweal\*.” He afterwards setteth himself to shew,  
 that things would be as well ordered in the world without the  
 supposition and expectation of a future judgment, as with it; that  
 men’s duties and obligations would still be the same, and so would  
 the motives to adhere to virtue, and to avoid vice: nor is the  
 belief of it of any great advantage to society †: To all which it  
 may be added, that here again, in treating concerning a future  
 judgment, he takes care to repeat what he had said in the fore-  
 going section, *viz.* that if the soul be perishable, and is dissolved  
 with the body, then this world seems to be *man’s all*, and that  
 on such a supposition, a *resurrection* or *restoration*, and a *future*  
*retribution*, seem to be excluded: and at the same time he de-  
 clareth, that whether the soul perisheth with the body or not, is  
 a thing which admitteth of no proof ‡. So that, upon the whole,  
 he really leaveth it as a matter quite uncertain, whether there  
 shall be a future judgment or not: and yet, when he has a mind  
 to make a boast of the good tendency of his principles, he is for  
 making a merit of it, that it is one of those important truths,  
 which he has taken pains to inculcate on the minds of men.

I have insisted the longer upon these things, that I may un-  
 mask the fair pretences of this author, who sets up for an un-  
 common degree of openness and candour. His admirers may  
 hence see how consistent he is, and how far his professions are  
 to be depended on.

I shall now consider what he hath offered in this his solemn  
*Farewell to his Readers*, with regard to revealed religion.

As to revelation in general, he seems to make a very fair  
 concession. “ When men (saith he) are sunk into gross igno-  
 “ rance and error, and are greatly vitiated in their affections and  
 “ actions, then God may, for any reason I can see to the con-  
 “ trary, kindly interpose, by a special application of his power  
 “ and providence, and reveal to men such useful truths as other-  
 “ wise they might be ignorant of, or might not attend to; and also  
 “ lay before them such rules of life as they ought to walk by;  
 “ and likewise press their obedience with proper motives, and

\* Chubb’s posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 395. 397.

† Ibid. p. 399.

‡ Ibid. p. 401. 410.

§ Ibid. p. 292, 293.

“ thereby

“thereby lead them to repentance and reformation\*.” But, as if he was afraid that in this he had made too large a concession, he adds, “but then that it is so, and when it is so, will in the nature of the thing be matter of doubt and disputation.” And in his sixth section, where he treateth expressly of revelation, he asserteth, that, in what way soever God communicateth knowledge to men, “it must be a matter of uncertainty, whether the revelation be divine or not, because we have no rule to judge, or from which we can with certainty distinguish divine revelation from delusion:” and that if this be the case with those who receive the revelation at first hand, then surely it must be uncertain to those who receive it from them †. Thus, though he seems to grant, that God may on some occasions *kindly interpose, by a special application of his power and providence*, to reveal to men useful truths, and to direct and excite them to their duty; yet he will not allow that he can communicate the knowledge of his will in such a way, as to give them a sufficient satisfying assurance that it is a divine revelation, and came from him. This is a most presumptuous and unreasonable limitation of the divine power and wisdom, and is in effect the same thing as to say, that he cannot communicate any revelation of his will to mankind at all; even though his goodness should dispose him to do so, and their circumstances should require it. Dr. Tindal had in effect said the same thing with our author; and what he offered to this purpose was fully considered and obviated in the answers that were made to him ‡.

From the question concerning revelation in general, Mr. Chubb proceeds, in his sixth section, to make some observations on the Jewish, Mahometan, and Christian revelation in particular.

The first of these he absolutely rejecteth. He pretends, that God's moral character is sullied by it: that St. Peter and St. Paul condemn it as unworthy of the Deity; that it had a vast multiplicity of rites and ceremonies, which he supposes to be perfectly arbitrary, and instituted without any reason at all: that it represents God as acting partially, in choosing the Jewish nation to be

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 292, 293. † Ibid. vol. ii. p. 5.

‡ See Conybeare's Defence of Revealed Religion, chap. vii. Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. ii. chap. 1.

a peculiar people; and that, in that constitution, a twelfth part of the people lived idly on the labour of the rest: that the appearances of God to the patriarchs, to Moses, &c. could only belong to a local circumscribed deity: and that the God of Israel was not the supreme Being, but only some tutelar subordinate god, consonant to the pagan idolatry: and that his conduct in ordering the Israelites to extirpate the Canaanites was inconsistent with the moral character of the Deity. This is the sum of what he urges, for several pages together in his sixth section, with regard to the Jewish revelation\*. And he had insisted upon the same things before at greater length in his second section †, where he also condemns the punishing idolatry with death under the Jewish constitution as unjust, and as tending to justify persecution for conscience sake. These, and other objections to the same purpose, had been urged with great vivacity by Dr. Morgan, in his *Moral Philosopher*, and were fully considered and obviated in the first and second volumes of *The divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*. Mr. Chubb has thought fit to repeat the objections, without giving any new strength to them that I can find, or taking off the force of the answers which had been returned.

Referring therefore to what I have more largely insisted upon in the books now mentioned, I shall at present only observe in brief, that the idea given of God in the Jewish scriptures, of his greatness and majesty, of his power and wisdom, of his justice, goodness, and purity, and of his universal presence and dominion, is the noblest that can be conceived by the human mind, and the most fitted to produce holy affections and dispositions towards him: That nothing can be more evident, than that the God proposed to the Jews, as the proper object of their worship, is the one living and true God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, who created all things by his power, who preserveth and governeth all things by his providence: That as to the divine appearances mentioned in the Old Testament, no argument can be brought to prove, that the sovereign Lord of the universe may not see fit on some occasions to exhibit himself by a visible ex-

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 19—29.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 189—231.

ternal glory and splendour, in order to strike men with a more strong and lively sense of his immediate presence; or that he may not in that case make use of a glorious subordinate being or beings of an order superior to man; and some such beings have been acknowledged by the best and wisest men in all ages, in delivering messages in his name: That it is no way inconsistent with God's universal care and providence towards mankind, to make extraordinary discoveries of his will to particular persons, or to a people, or to give them wise and excellent laws, and establish a constitution among them, the fundamental principle of which is the acknowledgment and adoration of the one living and true God, in opposition to all idolatry. Nor is there the least shadow of reason to prove, that he could not in such a case make the observance of this the principal condition on which the national privileges and benefits he thought fit to confer upon that people should be suspended; in which case, whosoever was guilty of idolatry under that peculiar constitution, was justly obnoxious to the penalties inflicted upon the enemies and subverters of the community. That as to God's choosing the people of Israel, they not only proceeded from ancestors, eminent for piety and virtue, and pure adorers of the Deity, but may be justly supposed, at the time of God's erecting that sacred polity among them, to have been, notwithstanding all their faults, freer from idolatry and other vices than any of the neighbouring nations. They seem to have been much better than the people of Egypt, from whence they were delivered; or than the Canaanites, whose land was given them, and who appear to have been a most wicked and abandoned race of men, universally guilty, not only of the grossest idolatries, but of the most monstrous vices and abominations of all kinds. And if God saw fit on that occasion to order them to be extirpated, as a monument to all ages of his just detestation of such crimes and vices, this cannot be proved to be inconsistent with the character of the wise and righteous governor of the world: though our author represents this as a millstone that hangs at the neck of the Mosaic dispensation. With respect to the laws that were given to the people of Israel, those of a moral nature, of which there is a comprehensive summary in the Ten Commandments, are unquestionably holy and excellent; the judicial laws are wise and equitable; and the positive precepts, though

many and various, wisely suited to the state and circumstances of that time and people. The reasons of several of them may be assigned even at this distance; and that there were very proper reasons for the rest may be justly supposed. And St. Peter and St. Paul, even when they represent them as burdensome, plainly shew, that they look upon them to have been originally instituted for wise ends, though no longer to be observed, when a more perfect dispensation was introduced, to which they were designed to be subservient. The appointing the Priests and Levites, and distributing them among the other tribes, is so far from being a just objection against that constitution, that it may be justly regarded as a wise and excellent institution, well fitted for preserving and spreading the knowledge of religion, and the law among the people, and instructing them in their duty; and the provision made for them was justly due, both as a reward for their service, and as an equivalent for their not having had a distinct portion and share of the land assigned them with the other tribes. Finally, the Mosaic constitution was attended at its first establishment with the most glorious and amazing demonstrations of a divine power and majesty, and which plainly shewed an extraordinary divine interposition: and these facts were done not in secret, but in the most open public manner, of which the whole nation were witnesses; and the memory of them constantly preserved, both by solemn public memorials, and in authentic records, which have all the characters of genuine antiquity; simplicity, and a sincere regard to truth, and have been always regarded by the whole nation with the profoundest veneration. Nor is there any just foundation for the author's pretence, that the sacred history was entirely in the hands of the priests, or that from Solomon's time to the Babylonish captivity none had access to it but the high-priest, and that in that captivity their law was entirely destroyed and lost\*: a supposition that has been frequently repeated by the deistical writers, though the absurdity of it has been fully exposed.

Though Mr. Chubb hath absolutely rejected the Jewish revelation, he speaks very favourably of that of Mahomet †. Among other instances of his regard to it, he takes upon him to pronounce,

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 26, 27. † Ibid. p. 30, &c.

that

that "it cannot surely be true, that the great prevalence of Mahometanism was owing to its being propagated by the sword; because it must have prevailed to a very great degree before the sword could have been drawn in its favour." And yet it is a thing capable of the clearest proof, that Mahometanism from its first appearance was propagated by the sword. This was what Mahomet himself most expressly required and recommended, and he accordingly spread his religion considerably by force of arms in his life-time; and immediately after his death, the chief apostles of Mahometanism were captains and mighty generals, who spread their conquests far and wide. Our author concludes his account of Mahometanism with saying, "whether the Mahometan revelation be of a divine original, or not, there seems to be a plausible pretence, arising from the circumstances of things, for stamping a divine character upon it\*.

As to the Christian revelation, it is evident he has done all in his power to expose it; and yet he seems plainly to acknowledge Christ's divine mission. "That there was such a person as Jesus Christ, and that he, in the main, did and taught as is recorded of him, appears (saith he) to be probable; because it is improbable that Christianity should take place in the way and to the degree it did, or at least that we are told it did, supposing the history of Christ's life and ministry to be a fiction." He adds, that "if such power attended Jesus Christ in the exercise of his ministry, as the history sets forth, then seeing his ministry and the power that attended it seems, at least in general, to have terminated in the public good, it is more likely that God was the primary agent in the exercise of that power, than any other invisible being. And then it is probable, that Jesus Christ, upon whose will the immediate exercise of that power depended, would not use that power to impose upon and mislead mankind to their hurt, seeing that power appears to have been well directed and applied in other respects, and seeing he was accountable to his principal for the abuse of it." He adds—"from these premises, or from this general view of the case, I think this conclusion follows, *viz.* it is probable Christ's mission was divine; at least it appears so to me from the light or

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 40.



“information I have received concerning it\*.” And as he seems here to acknowledge Christ’s mission to be divine, so he undertakes to give an account what was the subject of his mission, or what it was that he was sent to publish to the world. This he reduceth to three main principles, for which he referreth to a tract he had formerly published, intitled, *The true Gospel of Christ*, viz. 1. That nothing but a conformity of mind and life to the eternal rule of righteousness will render men acceptable to God. 2. That when men have deviated from that rule, nothing but a thorough repentance and reformation will render them the proper objects of God’s mercy. And lastly, that God will judge the world in righteousness, and will render to every man according as his works shall be. He adds, that these propositions seem to him to contain the sum and substance of Christ’s ministry: and as they are altogether worthy of the Deity, so, he thinks, they may with propriety and truth be called, *the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. This is what he declares in his second volume, p. 82, 83.; and he had said the same thing before, vol. i. p. 98, 99, where he observes, that “these things contain the substance of what Christ “was in a special manner sent of God to acquaint the world with.” And again he declares, that by Christianity he means, “that revelation of God’s will which Christ was in a special and particular manner sent to acquaint the world with; and as far as the “writings of the apostles are consonant with it, they come under the denomination of Christianity †:” where he seems fairly to own, that Christ was sent in a *particular and special manner to acquaint the world with a revelation of God’s will*. He also acknowledges, that “the writings of the apostles contain excellent cautions, advices, and instructions, which serve for the “right conducting our affections and actions: That the Christian revelation, one would hope, was kindly intended to guide “men’s understandings into the knowledge of those truths, in “which their highest interest is concerned, and to engage them “to be justly affected therewith, and act accordingly; and that “it naturally tends to reform the vices, and rightly to direct the “affections and behaviour of men.” And finally, “that it may

\* Chubb’s posthumous Works, vol. ii. 41, 42, 43. compared with p. 394, 395, 396.

† Ibid. p. 346.

“ perhaps

“ perhaps be a piece of justice due to Christianity (could it be  
 “ certainly determined what it is, and could it be separated  
 “ from every thing that hath been blended with it), to acknow-  
 “ ledge that it yields a much clearer light, and is a more safe  
 “ guide to mankind, than any other traditionary religion, as be-  
 “ ing better adapted to improve and perfect human nature\*.”

These things would naturally lead us to think, that he had a friendly design towards Christianity and the holy Scriptures. But, notwithstanding all these specious professions, whosoever reads what he calls his *Farewell to his Readers*, with ever so little attention, must be convinced, that the principal design of it was to subvert the credit and divine authority of the Christian revelation.

Though he declares, that he looks upon it to be probable that Christ's mission was divine, yet he has taken great pains to shew, that the proofs which are brought for it are not at all to be depended upon. Having observed, that the two principal arguments or evidences usually insisted on to prove the divine original of the Christian revelation are prophecy and miracles, he uses his utmost efforts to invalidate both these: two long sections of his *Farewell to his Readers* are employed this way, *viz.* the seventh and eighth: and as to the resurrection of Christ, he labours for near fifty pages together to represent it as an absurd and incredible thing †.

In his ninth section, in which he proposes to treat of the personal character of Jesus Christ, he does all he can to expose the account given of his being born of a virgin, as a fiction ‡. And whereas Christ is represented as having been perfect, and without sin, he will have it to be understood, not that he was absolutely sinless, but that no public or gross miscarriages could be charged upon him §. The highest character he seems willing to allow him is, that he was the “ founder of the Christian sect ||,” or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, that he “ collected a body of disciples, “ and laid a foundation for a new sect among the Jews\*\* : for he supposes, that, according to Jesus's original intention, Christianity

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 297. 344. 347. 370.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 333; &c.

‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 268—285.

§ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 269.

|| Ibid. vol. i. p. 50.

\*\* Ibid. vol. ii. p. 395.

was only designed to be a *supplement* to Judaism, and that the Mosaical constitution was to continue always in full force, and that his gospel was to be preached only to the Jews in all nations, and not to the Gentiles at all, though the apostles afterwards deviated from his plan\*. He owns indeed, that he advanced some proper precepts of his own, in which he seemed to correct the constitutions of Moses; but he endeavours to shew, that in these he made alterations for the worse, and that those precepts by which he is thought to have been most distinguished, instead of being more excellent than those of other teachers and law-givers, are really less excellent, and less perfect; and, if taken in their proper and natural sense, are contrary to the reason of things, and inconsistent with the welfare and happiness of mankind. This is the principal design he appears to have had in view, in what he calls *Remarks on the Scriptures*; which is the first tract in his *Posthumous Works*.

In some of the passages above cited, he seems to give a favourable account of Christianity, and proceeds so far as to specify what the true gospel of Christ is, and what that message is, which he allows Christ was sent of God to deliver to the world; yet in plain contradiction to himself, he asserts in several parts of his book, that it is utterly uncertain what message Christ was sent to publish to the world, or wherein true Christianity doth consist. This is what he particularly endeavoureth to shew in his sixth section †. And in that very passage before cited, where he pretends that it is a *piece of justice due to Christianity*, to acknowledge, that it *yields a much clearer light*, and is a *more safe guide than any other traditional religion*, he at the same time insinuates, that it *cannot be defined or determined what Christianity is* ‡. He asserts, that “it has been so loosely and indeter-  
“minately delivered to the world, that nothing but contention  
“and confusion has attended it from its first promulgation to this  
“time: and that the books of the New Testament have been so  
“far from being a remedy to this evil; that they have contri-  
“buted to it §.” Accordingly, he expressly calls the New Testa-  
ment, that *fountain of confusion and contradiction* ||. And

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 85, 86. 168. † Ibid. p. 72—122.

‡ Ibid. p. 370.

§ Ibid. p. 57. 315.

|| Ibid. p. 246, 247.

whereas

whereas Mr. Chillingworth had said, that *the Bible is the religion of Protestants*, Mr. Chubb thinks, that "unless it be so interpreted as to be made conformable to the great rule of right and wrong, which, he says, in some instances cannot be done without force and violence, it must be an unsafe guide to mankind\*;" and that to appeal to Scripture "would be a certain way to perplexity and dissatisfaction, but not to find out the truth†." And before this he had said, that "the Bible has been the grand source of heresies and schisms; and that it exhibits doctrines seemingly the most opposite, some of which are greatly dishonourable to God, others the most injurious to men‡." I think it is not easy to give a worse idea of the scriptures than this author has done. If his account of them be a just one, it must be very dangerous to read them; and it would be a kindness to keep them out of the hands of the people: for he seems directly to charge all this upon the scriptures themselves, and not upon the fault of those that pervert and abuse them. And yet this very consistent writer declares against *locking up the Bible from the people*, and that "this is most unsafe, as it has put the people so far under the power of the clergy, as to involve them in the most gross ignorance and superstition, and the most absolute slavery both in civil and religious matters§." Is not this plainly to acknowledge, that the being well acquainted with the holy scriptures is one of the best preservatives against ignorance, priestcraft, and superstition, and a great advantage and security to truth and liberty? And what then must we think of the attempt made by him and other deistical writers to expose and vilify the holy Scriptures, and destroy all veneration for them in the minds of men, which, if believed, must induce an absolute neglect, and even contempt, of those sacred writings? Ought not this, by his own acknowledgment, to be regarded as an attempt to bring us back into the *most gross ignorance, superstition, and slavery?*

As a farther proof of the author's good-will towards Christianity, it may be observed, that he represents it as favouring of enthusiasm; and he explains enthusiasm to be "a groundless per-

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 326.

† Ibid. p. 335.

‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 6. 57.

§ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 327. 345.

“ suasion, that the Deity dictates and impresses upon the mind of  
 “ the promulger the subject matter of his ministry, and therefore  
 “ such ministry is supposed to be not of or from men, but of and  
 “ from God\*.” And as he here supposes Christianity to be the  
 product of enthusiasm, so he elsewhere charges the apostles and  
 first publishers of Christianity with imposture. He represents  
 them as capable of giving a *false testimony* to serve the Christian  
 cause, and that they acted upon this principle, “ that truth in some  
 cases may and ought to be dispensed with, and made to give  
 way to falsehood and dissimulation;” and upon this he asks,  
 “ How then will the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ and his  
 “ apostles be proved to be other than impostures? supposing  
 “ them to be much better attested than at present they appear  
 “ to be †.”

These and other things that might be mentioned may let us  
 into the true spirit and design of this writer, and may help us to  
 judge of the protestations he has made with great solemnity in  
 the conclusion of his *Farewell to his Readers*. “ If any say, that  
 “ what I have written is out of disrespect to the person and mi-  
 “ nistry of Jesus Christ, the accusation is false.” And he adds,  
 “ as upon the Christian scheme, Jesus Christ will be the judge of  
 “ quick and dead, so I assure my readers, that in this view, and  
 “ upon this consideration, I have no disagreeable apprehension  
 “ on account of any thing that I have published to the world ‡.”

Having given this general idea of our author's work, I shall  
 in my next letter offer some remarks upon those parts of his book  
 which may seem to require a more particular consideration.

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 49. 53.

† Ibid. p. 92, 93. 130, 131. 230, 231.

‡ Ibid. p. 533.

## L E T T E R    X I V .

*Some farther Remarks on Mr. Chubb's Posthumous Works—  
The unfair Representation he makes of our Saviour's Precepts  
in his Sermon on the Mount—His gross Perversions of Scrip-  
ture—His Charge against it, as uncertain, and as having been  
greatly depraved and corrupted by the Church of Rome, con-  
sidered—Observations upon the Attempt he makes to invalidate  
the Proof from Prophecy and Miracles—The Parallel he draws  
between the Propagation of Christianity and the Progress of  
Methodism examined—The Falseness of his Pretence, that the  
Apostles quite changed the original Plan of Christianity, and  
that they laid a Scheme for worldly Wealth and Power—His  
Invectives against St. Paul malicious and unjust—He repre-  
sents all Religions to be alike with regard to the Favour of  
God, and pretends to direct Men to an infallible Guide.*

S I R,

**I**N my last, I gave a general account of Mr. Chubb's posthu-  
mous treatises. I shall now add some farther observations  
relating to some parts of those tracts which may seem to deserve  
to be more particularly considered.

Of this kind is the attempt he hath made to expose our Savi-  
our's precepts in his admirable sermon on the mount, which  
is designed to teach the most pure and excellent morality. In  
several of these precepts, our Lord evidently maketh use of a  
proverbial way of speaking, short and comprehensive aphorisms,  
delivered in phrases, some of which may perhaps appear not so  
usual among us, but which were familiar to those to whom they  
were at first delivered. Every one knows, that, in such cases,  
every expression is not to be taken in the utmost strictness, but  
the general intention is to be regarded, which is plain enough to  
an honest and attentive mind. But this writer seems resolved to  
take them in the most absurd sense he can possibly put upon  
them. Thus, he interprets the precept against resisting evil,  
which is manifestly intended to check and suppress private  
revenge, and to teach us that wise lesson, "that it is better in  
many

many cases, patiently to bear injuries, especially in smaller instances, than to give way to a keen and forward resentment and retaliation of them," as if it were designed absolutely, and in all cases, to forbid us to shun or guard against the evils and injuries offered to us, and required us rather to expose ourselves to those evils. But this certainly could not be the intention of that excellent teacher, who exhorteth his disciples to be *wise as serpents* in avoiding evil, as well as *innocent as doves*; and directeth them, instead of needlessly exposing themselves, when *persecuted in one city, to flee unto another*. The precept about loving our enemies is designed to restrain and heal that bitter and malevolent spirit which men are so apt to indulge, and to carry benevolence to the noblest height. It teacheth us, that no private enmities or disgusts should cause us to forget the common ties of humanity: that with regard to our enemies themselves, we should be earnestly desirous of their amendment and true happiness, and should be ready, when a proper opportunity offers, to do them good offices, and to overcome their enmity with kindness, which is the noblest victory. But our candid author would have it to be understood to signify, that we should put no difference in our affection and esteem between good and bad men, but should have an equal complacency in persons of the vilest characters as in those of the best\*. And because our Saviour speaks of God's doing good, in the methods of his common providence, even to the unthankful and the evil, he pretends, that, according to his representation, the perfection of the Supreme Being consisteth in his being affected towards all intelligent beings alike, and shewing equal love and favour to the righteous and to the wicked; than which nothing can be more contrary to Christ's manifest intention, and to the whole tenor of his teaching and ministry. Our Lord's excellent discourse against anxious cares, and a distracting or distrustful thoughtfulness for to-morrow, he interprets as designed to recommend *thoughtlessness and indolence*, and absolutely to forbid that *thoughtfulness and industry, which man's present indigent condition, and the present constitution of things, make necessary*†. And the precept by which we are directed *not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, but to lay*

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 18. 19. † Ibid. p. 22, 23.

up for ourselves *treasures in heaven*, which is plainly intended to check a too eager pursuit of worldly riches, and a placing our chief happiness in these things, he represents as if it were designed absolutely to condemn all worldly acquisitions, however lawfully obtained, and well used and employed. In like manner, he interprets what our Saviour says in a parabolical way, Luke xvi. 12, 13. concerning inviting the poor, the blind, and the lame; and which, as may be gathered from the context by comparing ver. 7, &c. was designed to rebuke the vanity of expensive and ostentatious entertainments, whilst the poor and indigent were neglected; as if it were his intention, that all Christians should deny themselves the pleasure of ever entertaining, or being entertained by friends, relations, and those of their own rank, and were to confine themselves wholly to the company, conversation, and friendship of the *poor*, the *maimed*, the *lame*, and the *blind*\*; though it is very evident from his own practice, that our Lord Jesus was far from discouraging an agreeable intercourse and conversation among friends, and the offices and entertainments of the social life; and I dare say, not one either of the Jews, or of his own disciples, ever understood him in this sense.

But Mr. Chubb takes upon him to pronounce, that these and the like precepts are all to be understood in the most strict literal sense, and do not admit of *any limitation*, or any palliating interpretation to be put upon them; and he represents them as the proper precepts of Christianity, *peculiar*, as he expresseth it, to the *Christian sect*, and in which their founder's honour is peculiarly concerned; and pretends, that the observance of these alone, in the absurd sense he puts upon them, is what constitutes a true Christian. And as these are the precepts that are acknowledged to be peculiarly Christian, he thinks that from thence a judgment may be formed, whether there be any just ground for boasting, that Christian morals are much more excellent and perfect, than any other system of morals that hath been exhibited to men\*.

Nothing can possibly be more unfair and disingenuous, than this conduct of our author. No man of candour, who considers the deep wisdom and good sense which appeareth in our Saviour's discourses, can reasonably suppose, that it was his intention to

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 25, 26.

† Ibid. p. 27, 28. 31. 39, 40.



recommend such absurd instructions and advices as they must have been, according to this writer's representation of them. Our Lord's design, in his excellent sermon on the mount, was not, as he himself declares, to destroy the law and the prophets; it was to vindicate them from the narrow and corrupt glosses of the Jewish doctors. And what could be more worthy of a teacher sent from God, the great Saviour and lover of mankind, than to forbid the being angry without a cause, all injurious and reproachful expressions, all adultery and impurity, even in heart and thought; and to recommend purity, charity, meekness, benevolence, the forgiveness of injuries, and even a rendering good for evil, and overcoming evil with good? to warn men against an excessive love of worldly riches, which hath in all ages been the source of numberless evils and disorders among mankind, and engage them to raise their affections and views to things of a far higher and nobler nature, things celestial and eternal? to direct men to a calm contentment and dependence on divine providence, in every condition, as the best preservative against those anxious distracting cares and solitudes, which, when they prevail, destroy the relish of life? What our Saviour hath delivered on these, and on other heads of great importance to the happiness of mankind, is comprehended in short maxims, strongly and closely expressed, which makes them more apt to strike, and more easily remembered; but without descending to particular exceptions and limitations, which, for the most part, common sense, and the nature of the thing, easily direct to. He, who was perfectly acquainted with human nature, very well knew, that there was no great danger of men's taking them in too strict a sense, and that they would be forward enough to find out limitations for themselves. And any one that impartially considers the variety of matters treated of, in that excellent sermon on the mount, such a vast extent of pure and noble morals comprized in so small a compass, and delivered with the most comprehensive brevity; will be apt to admire the wisdom of this heavenly teacher, and to have a just dislike of a writer that could turn those admirable lessons to the disadvantage of the holy Jesus and the Christian religion. And I am persuaded, that any man who should treat the maxims and wise sayings of the philosophers or great men of antiquity, as this author has done those of our Saviour, would be regarded

regarded by all rational and thinking men among the deists themselves, as a rude and impertinent caviller. What renders Mr. Chubb more inexcusable is, that he himself seems to have been very sensible, that those precepts were not intended in the sense he has thought fit to put upon them: for though, in what he calls *Remarks on the Scriptures*, he contends, as hath been shewn, that no other interpretation ought to be admitted, yet in another part of his *Posthumous Works*, viz. in the ninth section of his *Farewell*, where he professes to treat concerning the personal character of Jesus Christ, he produces these very precepts as instances of Christ's figurative way of speaking, and plainly owns, that they ought not to be taken, nor were originally intended, in the strict literal sense he had put upon them. To this purpose he particularly mentions the precepts of not resisting evil, of loving our enemies, and giving to every one that asketh\*; and from thence concludes, that we must use our reason in judging of the sense of scripture, and of our Saviour's precepts; which will be readily allowed. The scripture undoubtedly supposeth us to be reasonable creatures, and our Saviour addresseth himself to us as such: but it by no means follows, as he insinuates, that because we are to use our understandings in judging of the sense of scripture, and all laws, that therefore our own reason could guide us as well without them, and that these precepts are of no use, and that it is of no advantage to have them enforced by a divine authority.

It may not be improper on this occasion to take notice of some other of his gross perversions of scripture. A signal instance of this kind we have in the same tract, in which he makes so strange a representation of several of our Saviour's precepts. Speaking of that noted passage, 1 John ii. 1, 2. *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.* He observes, that "this passage may be supposed to bespeak comfort and safety to a wicked Christian, *i. e.* to a wicked man who is a believer in Jesus Christ, and professes discipleship to him; and that it

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 289, 293, 294, &c.

“ is but for a man to apply these words of John to himself, and “ the practice of vice is made easy to him\*.” That this could not possibly be St. John’s meaning in this passage, is evident from the whole tenour of his epistle, and particularly from the words immediately following, in which he declares, *hereby we do know that we know him, i. e. Jesus Christ, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ver. 3. 4.* Our author himself is sensible, that the interpretation he hath given of this passage is not consistent with what St. John hath said in other parts of his epistle. But that gives him no concern; it will only shew that St. John contradicts himself; which is what he would have him thought to do: and therefore with an unparalleled assurance he insinuateth upon it, that the account he hath given of St. John’s meaning, is the true one, “ whatever “ St. John, or any other writer of the New Testament, in opposition to this, may have elsewhere said to the contrary.” His manner of expressing himself plainly shews, that he is resolved this shall be St. John’s sense, contrary to his own most express declarations, and to the entire strain of the New Testament; because he thinks it tends to expose Christianity, though in reality by such a procedure he has only exposed himself. But he urgeth, that “ if Christ be the propitiation for all sins, then “ the most wicked Christian must needs be in a safe and comfortable state; and even wicked pagans and infidels, as well as “ Christians, penitent and impenitent, because God would not “ be so unreasonable and unjust, as to take double satisfaction “ for the same offences.” And in some other parts of his book, he inveighs against the doctrine of Christ’s being the propitiation for sins, as contrary to truth, and the eternal reason of things †. But in all that he has said on this head, he either discovers a gross ignorance of the scripture-doctrine of Christ’s being the propitiation for our sins, or makes a wilful misrepresentation of it; since nothing can be more evident than it is from the whole New Testament, that Christ’s dying for our sins was not designed to free men from an obligation to holiness and obedience, but rather to lay them under stronger engagements to it; and that accord-

\* Chubb’s posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 37, 38.

† Ibid. p. 250. and vol. ii. p. 112, 113. 304.

ing to the gospel covenant, none can expect an interest in the benefits arising from Christ's sufferings and sacrifice, or from his mediation and intercession, but those that turn from their sins by a sincere repentance, and who submit to be governed by his holy and most excellent laws. The doctrine of Christ's satisfaction, rightly understood, is so far from giving the least encouragement to sin, that it tendeth to impress men's hearts with the deepest sense of the heinous evil and malignity of sin, and of God's just displeasure against it. Not only do those who teach that doctrine as delivered in the scriptures, insist as strongly as any others upon the necessity of repentance and personal holiness, in order to their acceptance with God, but they maintain, that at the same time that God promiseth pardon to the truly penitent, he taketh care to dispense that pardon in such a way, as to make an awful declaration of his hatred against sin, and to vindicate the authority of his government and laws. What can have a greater tendency to prevent our abusing his pardoning mercy, and to excite in us a holy fear of offending him, than to consider that he would not receive even penitent sinners to his grace and favour, without a sacrifice of infinite virtue offered up on their behalf, consisting in the perfect obedience and sufferings of the great Mediator? And that it was upon the merit of his obedience and sufferings, that that covenant was founded and established, in which God hath graciously engaged to accept of our repentance, and to reward our sincere though imperfect obedience with eternal life?

Many other instances might be mentioned of Mr. Chubb's strange glosses upon scripture. He seems particularly to take pleasure in misrepresenting and exposing the writings of St. Paul. Thus, because that great apostle, in arguing against the false Jewish teachers, who insisted upon the observance of the Mosaic law and ceremonies, as absolutely necessary to salvation under the gospel, urgeth, that, if they were *justified by the law*, they were *fallen from grace*, *i. e.* from the grace of the gospel, and the way of justification there proposed, Gal. v. 4. he charges him with maintaining in the height of his zeal, that *obedience to the law of Moses was incompatible with salvation*; and that let men otherwise be ever so good and excellent persons, this error concerning the obligation of the Mosaic law would exclude them  
from

from the favour of God, and from eternal salvation. *And in this, saith he, the Apostle must surely have greatly erred\**. But it ought to be considered, that those Jewish teachers, whom St. Paul there opposes, are represented as men of corrupt minds, who acted from worldly and sinister ends and views, and who were not strict in keeping the law themselves, though they were for binding it upon others, Gal. vi. 12, 13. And the apostle there expressly declarcth, that in Christ Jesus, or under the gospel dispensation, *neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, i. e.* neither the observance nor non-observance of these outward rites, *but faith which worketh by love*, or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, the *new creature, i. e.* a real sanctifying change of heart and life. See Gal. v. 6. vi. 15. 1 Cor. vii. 19. Again, he pretends, that St. Paul represents the calling of the Gentiles as not originally designed by God, or as an effect of his goodness towards the Gentiles, but as springing only from his having *taken up a pique or resentment against the Jews*, which, he says, "is a spring of action much too low, and altogether unworthy of the supreme Deity †." But nothing is more evident than that this apostle frequently ascribes the calling of the Gentiles to the free grace and gratuitous favour of God, and speaks of it in noble terms, as having been designed in the councils of the divine wisdom and love before the foundation of the world, Eph. i. 3, 4, 5, 6. iii. 8, 9. Farther to expose that excellent apostle, he represents it, as if in saying, that *if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable*, 1 Cor. xv. 19. he intended to signify, that the practice of piety and virtue is not in its own nature so eligible, or so conducive to the real satisfaction of this present life, as that of vice and sin. Nor will he allow that St. Paul in this part of the argument has any reference to the case of persecution; and yet certain it is, that he most expressly refers to it, ver. 29, 30, 31, 32.; and his evident design is to signify the unhappy condition Christians would be reduced to, under the grievous persecutions to which they were then exposed, if it were not for their future hopes. But he especially finds great fault with St. Paul for his doctrine concerning subjection to the higher powers, Rom. xiii. 1. 6. a s

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 96, 97:

† Ibid. p. 88.

if it were calculated for promoting tyranny and slavery. This he insists upon for several pages together, in two different parts of his *Posthumous Works*; and yet the apostle's doctrine, rightly considered, is admirable. He shews, that obedience to the civil powers is a duty which Christianity enjoins; that it was not designed to exempt men from subjection to their lawful governors, though heathens, or to relax the bands of civil duty and allegiance. He doth not meddle with the questions concerning the rights of Senates, or particular forms of polity, but speaks of the duty of private persons, and therefore presses their obedience and subjection, without restrictions and limitations; and to have mentioned such restrictions would certainly have been of bad consequence; especially considering the seditious dispositions of the Jews, and how they were then affected. But our author is not willing to allow, that religion has any thing to do with obedience to our civil governors; and, in express opposition to St. Paul, declares, that government cannot be said to be the ordinance, or by the appointment, of God. He maintains, that the proper argument for obliging men to subjection and obedience is, not government's being the ordinance of God, but its being necessary to the well-being of mankind. And does not the apostle manifestly urge this? He both raiseth our views to the original of government in the authority and appointment of God himself, and pointeth out to us the proper ends of government, and its great usefulness to mankind, and excellently argueth from both these. So that he is far from what this writer here thinks fit to charge him with, a *fallacious and injurious way of reasoning*.

He takes particular notice of the allegory \* St. Paul makes use of, Gal. iv. 21, &c. and uses his utmost endeavours to place it in a most ridiculous light. Nothing can be more unfair and disingenuous than the account he is pleased to give of it, in which he entirely misrepresents the design and strain of the apostle's discourse. But a particular examination of what he offers, with regard to this and several other passages of Scripture, would carry me too far. It is sufficient to observe, that a careful and un-

\* Mr. Collins had endeavoured to expose that allegory; and the design and consistency of it was fully cleared in the answers that were made to that writer. Nor has Mr. Chubb offered any thing upon it that can be called new.

prejudiced confideration of the context, and a comparing one part of Scripture with another, might eafily have fet him right as to the fenfe of moft of the paffages he mentions; or he might have found his difficulties cleared by able and judicious commentators, if he had been as willing to have his objections fatisfied, as he was to raife them, or as a fincere inquirer after truth ought to be. Candid critics, if they meet with a paffage in Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Tully, or any other celebrated profane author of antiquity, which at firft view has fomething in it that they cannot well explain or account for, are very unwilling to charge the original author with nonsense and absurdity, and think themselves obliged to ufe their utmoft endeavours to find out a convenient or favourable fenfe of the paffage in question. But with this writer, and many others of the fame clafs, it feems to be a rule to interpret every paffage of Scripture in the moft absurd fenfe that can poffibly be put upon it.

Several paffages were produced in my former letter, to which many others might be added, in which Mr. Chubb exclaims againft the fcripture as the fource of endless contentions and divifions, as if it were to be charged with all the absurd and contradictory opinions, that have at any time been grafted upon it. This he represents, as owing to its being “ expreffed in a loofe “ indeterminate way, which would be a defect in a human com- “ pofition, but is fcarce fupposable in the cafe of divine revela- “ tion\*.” But it is no argument, that a thing is loofely and indeterminately expreffed, becaufe men differ or contend about the fenfe of it. This is owing to other caufes. Supposing a divine revelation given to mankind, ever fo clear and determinate, it could fcarce be avoided, without a constant miraculous inter- pofition, irrefiftibly impreffing and overruling the minds of all men, but that there would be a difference of fentiments and opinions among mankind, about many things in it: and yet this would not hinder but that fuch a revelation would be of fignal ufe for inftructing men in things of great importance. The fallacy of fuch a way of arguing, as if men’s differing about any thing were a proof of its uncertainty, has been often expofed, as what would banifh all religion, truth, reason, and evidence, out

\* Chubb’s pofthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 246, 247.

of the world: yet this is a common-place with the deistical writers, to which they have recourse on all occasions. Many made use of it before our author: and since the publishing of his works, a late right honourable writer hath been pleased to renew the charge. I shall not here repeat what I have elsewhere offered in answer to his Lordship, and which will equally serve to obviate all that Mr. Chubb hath advanced on this head\*.

The same observation may be made with regard to his attempts against the sacred canon. He pretends, as others had done before him, that there is no proof that the books of the New Testament were written in the first age of the Christian church; that there were many spurious gospels in the primitive times, and that the Christians had no way of distinguishing the genuine from the false. These, and other things to the same purpose, he very frequently repeats in several parts of his *Farewell to his Readers*, as if he thought the frequent repetition of them would persuade his readers of their truth. But I shall not need to take any particular notice of them here, but refer to what was said on this subject in the fourth letter, where some account is given of the answers that were made to Toland's *Amyntor*: to which may be added, what hath been lately offered in answer to the same objections, when urged by the noble writer last-mentioned†.

Mr. Chubb hath also raised a great clamour about the corruption of Scripture. He layeth it down as a principle, that if God gave a revelation for the use of mankind, he would take care that it should be transmitted safe and uncorrupted to all succeeding generations, and would, by a particular and constant application of his power and providence, have defended it from all injury, wherever it was promulged, and whatever language it was rendered into. He intimates, that God ought to have punished with a sudden death, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, every man that had committed any error, either in transcribing or translating it. And if this had been the case, the consequence would have been, that no man would have ventured to transcribe or translate it at all: and this, no doubt, is what these gentlemen would wish. But there is no necessity for having recourse to such

\* See Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters, p. 125, &c.

† Ibid. p. 98, &c.



extraordinary methods; we have sufficient evidence to satisfy any reasonable person, that this revelation is transmitted to us, without any such corruptions or alterations as can destroy the usefulness of that revelation, or defeat the important ends for which it was originally given. This hath been often clearly shewn. Our author indeed pronounces with great confidence, that "it is a thing abundantly evident, that the Christian revelation hath been greatly depraved and corrupted; that its pretended guardians have extracted the mystery of iniquity from it: and that we have received the books referred to from that grand fountain of corruption the church of Rome, who must have been naturally, and almost unavoidably led to corrupt them in those times of ignorance, to justify herself in all other corruptions and abuses." This he frequently repeats, as his manner is, in several parts of his book, and it hath been often urged by the deistical writers\*; and it must be acknowledged, that if a general corruption of the Scriptures could have been possibly effected, none had so good an opportunity, or a stronger temptation to attempt it, than the church of Rome: and yet it is evident in fact, that they have not corrupted the Scriptures in those instances in which it was most their interest, and we might imagine also most in their inclination, to have corrupted them. There might be some pretence for such a charge, if there had been any express and formal passages inserted in the New Testament, in favour of the papal supremacy, of St. Peter's having been bishop of Rome, the worship of images, the invocation of saints and angels, purgatory, the communion in one kind, against priests' marriage, and in favour of the monastic vows, &c.; but our author hath not attempted to produce any passages of this kind; and he himself has observed, that "the New Testament was not sufficient to support the weight of the constitution of the church of Rome, and therefore its builders prudently annexed tradition to it †." He also finds fault with their locking up the Bible from the laity, as what hath put them so far under the power of the clergy, as to involve them in gross ignorance, superstition, and slavery. Thus, this very consistent writer, with

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 65, 66. 118. 121, 122.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 58.

a view to expose the New Testament, would persuade us, that popery is taught and founded there, and yet would have the Bible kept in the hands of the people as a proper preservative against it.

The arguments in favour of the Jewish and Christian revelation from prophecy and miracles have always been looked upon as of great weight; and Mr. Chubb hath taken great pains to invalidate both these. With regard to prophecy, which is the entire subject of the seventh section of his *Farewell to his Readers*\*, he pretends not to deny, that there may be true prophecy; that God may certainly foreknow future events, and may enable persons to foretel them: but he denies, that the prediction of future events can be admitted as an evidence of divine revelation, because a prophecy can never be known to be a true prophecy till it be fulfilled; and therefore can never be a proof or evidence at the time of its delivery, because it must appear as yet uncertain. His argument here proceeds upon a wrong supposition, as if the advocates for revelation maintained, that the mere prediction of a future event, even before the completion of it, were alone a sufficient proof to those who heard the prediction, of the divine mission of the persons who delivered it. This was far from being the only proof that was given either of the Mosaic or Christian revelation. They were both of them at their first promulgation attested and established by an amazing succession of the most wonderful works, and which plainly argued an extraordinary divine interposition: besides which, both Moses and the prophets under the Old Testament, and our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles under the New, were enabled to give many express predictions of future events; some of which related to things which were to happen in their own time, and received a speedy accomplishment; others related to events that were not to happen till some ages after the prediction, and these also received their accomplishment in the proper season. And this, added to the other evidences, exhibited a farther illustrious proof of a divine interposition in favour of the Jewish and Christian revelation, and shews, that the first publishers of it were extraordinarily inspired by God, who, by the author's own acknow-

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 139—174.

ledgment, can alone foresee and foretel future contingent events. It was wisely ordered, that miracles and prophecy should go together; whereby not only the most striking evidence was given to the truth and divinity of the revelation, at the time when it was first promulgated, but provision was made that there should be a growing evidence, which might acquire new force and strength by the successive accomplishment of the prophecies in the several different periods to which they refer. Indeed, if it were only a single prediction or two, the fulfilling of them might be looked upon to be accidental, and to amount to no more than a lucky conjecture: but a series of prophecies, such as is set before us in the sacred writings, many of them relating to things of a most contingent nature, removed at the distance of several ages, and which depended upon things that no human sagacity could foresee, must be ascribed to an extraordinary divine assistance; and it cannot reasonably be supposed, that God would impart his prescience to give credit to impostors, who falsely pretended to be inspired by him to deliver doctrines and laws to mankind.

As to that part of the evidence of Christ's divine mission, which resulteth from the prophecies of the Old Testament, this had been fully considered in the controversy between Mr. Collins and his adversaries, of which some account was given in the sixth letter. What Mr. Chubb has offered on this head is very inconsiderable: but he has one reflection that may deserve some notice: it is this: That, "supposing those prophecies to have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, they are not so much to be regarded as an evidence of the divine authority of the Christian revelation, as of the divine character of its primary promulger, who, being a free being, must have been at liberty whether he would have faithfully delivered those truths to the world, that had been delivered to him by his principal. And this," saith he, "must of necessity be the case of all divine revelation\*." But, supposing there was a series of prophecy, relating to a wonderful person, who was to appear, at a time prefixed, as a divine teacher and Lord, and who was to erect a dispensation of truth and righteousness, and that his coming, person, offices, miracles,

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, p. 152, 153.

sufferings, and the glories that should follow, were described and pointed out by many remarkable predictions, delivered at sundry times and in divers manners, all which were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and in him only; this certainly must be looked upon as an illustrious attestation, not only to the divinity of his mission, but to the truth of the revelation he brought in the name of God: for it were most absurd to suppose, that God would have inspired so many persons, in different ages, to foretell his coming and character as a divine teacher of truth and righteousness, if he had not perfectly foreknown that he would certainly fulfil that character, and fulfil the great trust reposed in him. And the preparing mankind for his coming by such a succession of prophecies, and pointing him out by the most glorious and peculiar characters, so many ages before his actual appearing, tended to give him an attestation of a peculiar kind, and which was never equalled in any other case.

With regard to the prophecies of Daniel, this author thinks it is impossible, "that God should deliver a prophecy so darkly, as that one man only, and he a prodigy, amidst the millions of men that have taken place since that prophecy was delivered, should be able to discover the true sense and meaning of it\*;" where he goes upon a supposition which is manifestly false, viz. that no man before Sir Isaac Newton was ever able to discover the meaning and intent of Daniel's prophecies. Many there have been who have laboured happily this way, both formerly and of late: and though there are several things in those prophecies that are attended with great difficulty, there are others of the predictions contained in that book, which are so clear, that the application of them is comparatively easy. And they have been wonderfully verified, in a manner which shews they could only have proceeded from that all-seeing mind which presides over contingencies, and clearly sees through the succession of ages. And the predictions there given relating to the Messiah, the design and end of his coming, and the desolation of Jewish city and temple that should be connected with it, are of such a nature, as to give a most remarkable attestation to our Lord Jesus Christ, as the true promised Messiah. And it may

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, p. 147, 148.

be observed by the way, that this shews the vanity and falsehood of another of our author's suppositions, who pretends, that the Jewish expectation of the Messiah was solely owing to the notion they had of their being God's peculiar people, from whence it was natural for them to believe, that God would raise them up a glorious deliverer, who should exalt their nation to the highest degree of prosperity and grandeur; and that the prophets humoured them in this their notion and expectation: For if this had been the case, the prophets would not have spoken of a suffering Messiah; nor would they have foretold, as they have done, his being rejected by the Jews, and the judgments which should be then executed upon that nation, and that the Gentiles should be partakers of the benefits of his kingdom.

This writer, who seems to value himself upon thinking out of the common way, can see nothing extraordinary in the predictions relating to the calamities and dispersions of the Jews, and their wonderful preservation, under all their dispersions and calamities, for a long succession of ages: and yet certain it is, that their being so generally dispersed among all nations over the whole earth, and being still preserved as a distinct people, notwithstanding the unexampled discouragements, reproaches, and sufferings, to which they have been exposed, is one of the most wonderful things, taken in all its circumstances, that is to be found in the whole history of mankind: and as it hath no parallel, its being so plainly foretold above three thousand years ago (for so long it is since the time of Moses, who first prophesied of it) is a most signal instance of a true prophetic spirit, and could only be owing to the inspiration of that omniscient Being, who *declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things which are not yet done.*

I shall only take notice of one observation more, which our author hath made with regard to the proof from prophecy, *vi* that it appears from St. Paul's account, that the gift of prophecy was a distinct gift from that of knowledge, 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9, and "that they had no connection or dependence upon one another:" and he thinks therefore, "that a person's foretelling things to come, does not prove a superiority of knowledge" and that the prophet's knowledge extends farther than the prophecies he delivers." But if we examine that passage of St. Paul's

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Paul which he refers to, we shall find it is far from answering the end he proposes by it, *viz.* to invalidate the proof from prophecy in favour of the Christian revelation. The apostle is then speaking of the several gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were poured forth on many of the Christian converts in that first age in various proportions and degrees according to his will. One of these was, that of prophecy. It is not certain, that by *prophecy*, in that particular passage, is to be understood the foretelling things to come; for the word prophecy is sometimes taken in that epistle in another sense: but allowing it to be so, since it appears from other passages that such a gift there was in the first age of the Christian church (and it was what our Saviour had promised, John xvi. 13.), in that case it must be said, that such a gift, if really conferred, could only proceed from God, or his Holy Spirit: and as those extraordinary gifts, of which this was one, were communicated by the laying on of the hands of the apostles in the name of a crucified and risen Jesus, the conferring these gifts on any of the Christian converts may be justly regarded as a most illustrious proof of a divine interposition in favour of Christianity, and of the divine mission of the apostles, the first authorized publishers of it.

Having considered the principal things this writer has urged on the head of prophecy, I shall take some notice of what he hath offered concerning the proof from miracles: This is the subject of his eighth section\*. He will not allow, that miracles can be any proof of the divine mission of persons or truth of doctrines. What he chiefly insisteth upon to this purpose is, that the power of working miracles may be equally annexed to falsehood and truth: and whereas it might be objected, that God will not suffer miraculous power to be misapplied, because, were that the case, mankind would be greatly exposed to imposition, he answers, "that when a miracle is once wrought, it must and will be in the option of the operator to apply that power as he pleases, either well or ill, nor could God prevent it, otherwise than by destroying his being or his agency." But supposing, which is the present supposition, a real power of working miracles communicated from God, with a view to give attestation to

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 177—249.

the divine mission of persons sent to instruct the world in important truths, it is absurd to suppose, that he would continue that power to them, if they applied it to the confirming of falsehood; or that he would have given them that power for attesting truth, if he foresaw they would use it in favour of falsehood; and in that case he must have foreseen it. With regard to the power of working miracles in the first age of the Christian church, it was not at the option of the persons who had that power to use it when or to what purpose they pleased. They could only work those miracles, when and upon what occasion it seemed fit to the Holy Ghost that they should do them; in which case they had an extraordinary impulse, which is usually called *the faith of miracles*, which was a kind of direction to them, when to work those miracles, and whereby they knew and were persuaded that God would enable them to do them. The proper use and design of those miracles was, to confirm the testimony given by the apostles to our Saviour and his resurrection, and the truth of the doctrines they taught as received from him: nor can any one proof be brought, though he takes it for granted, that any false teachers in that age did, by virtue of any extraordinary gift or powers of the Holy Ghost communicated to them, work miracles to confirm the false doctrines they preached. On the contrary, St. Paul appeals to the Galatians themselves, as in a matter of fact which could not be contested, that miracles were only wrought, and the extraordinary gifts of the spirit communicated, in attestation to that true doctrine of the gospel which he had preached, and not to that *other gospel*, as he calleth it, which the false teachers would have imposed upon them, Gal. iii. 2. 5. But I have elsewhere considered this matter at large, and shall not here repeat what was there offered\*.

But what our author chiefly bends himself to prove is, that the accounts given us of the miracles recorded in the New Testament are false or uncertain, and not at all to be depended on. To this purpose he mentions several of our Saviour's miracles, and repeats the same objections against them that had been urged by Mr. Woolston before, and to which solid answers had been re-

\* See Divine Authority of the Old and New Testament asserted, vol. i. p. 380—387.

turned. Every thing in the evangelical accounts that appears to him strange or extraordinary, he rejects at once. I cannot here enter into a distinct consideration of the several particulars he allegeth. I shall only mention one, on which he seems to lay a greater stress than any of the rest, and which he insists upon more than once, as alone sufficient to destroy the credit of the evangelical historians. It relates to the account given of our Saviour's temptations in the wilderness. It will be readily owned, that the fact referred to is of a very extraordinary nature. But a thing may be very strange and wonderful, and yet very true, and is to be received as such, if it comes to us vouched by a sufficient authority: and in this case the authority is sufficient; for I think it cannot reasonably be doubted, that the account came originally from our Lord himself, since no other could be supposed to know it, and that it was well known to the apostles and disciples to have come from him. It is distinctly related by two of the evangelists, St. Matthew and St. Luke; and referred to by a third, St. Mark. St. John, according to the method he pursues, of insisting chiefly upon things not mentioned by the rest, had no occasion to take notice of it. There is not the least reason to suppose, that the evangelists would have inserted such an account as this, if they had not been assured that the information came from Christ himself; and his authority is a sufficient warrant for believing it; nor is our author able to prove, that there is any thing here ascribed to Satan, which he might not be able, or might not be permitted to perform. In what manner he pretended to shew to our Saviour, *all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them*, we are not told; nor is there any necessity here of taking the word *all* in the strictest sense. But in what way soever this was done, concerning which we cannot pretend certainly to judge, this writer doth not know enough of the case to pronounce it impossible. Supposing there are evil spirits, can any man take upon him positively to determine how far their power and ability may extend? And that there are both good and evil spirits superior to man, hath been the general belief of mankind in all nations and ages, and even of the best and wisest of men; nor can a shadow of reason be brought to prove the existence of such spirits to be either impossible or improbable, though our author, in his great wisdom, has all along rejected all  
accounts



accounts where there is any mention made of angels or devils; with as much confidence, as if he could clearly demonstrate that there cannot possibly be any such thing.

He frequently speaks of the weakness and credulity of the favoured historians, and represents the accounts given in the gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, as mere fictions, *more like Jewish fables, or popish legends, than real facts*\*. He expressly declares, “that some of the popish miracles, though generally rejected by Protestants as fraud and imposture, are better attested than any of the miracles which were wrought, or supposed to be wrought, in the first century: and that had the like strict scrutiny been made in former times that is at present, those ancient miracles would have been rejected †.” But every thinking person will easily see a mighty difference in the case between miracles wrought before persons highly prejudiced in their favour, and in proof of the reigning religion, where power and interest is on their side, and where there is not a full liberty allowed to make a strict inquiry in the view of enemies themselves, and where the public prejudices lie on the other side, and power, interest, and authority are engaged against them. There will always be ground of suspicion in the former case, not equally so in the latter. The miracles said to be wrought by the Romish church are done in countries where popery is the established religion, and have power and the prejudices of the people, and an evident worldly interest, on their side: and they are not performed openly in the view of Protestants and for their conviction, in places where there is a full liberty of examining into all the circumstances relating to them: whereas the miracles whereby Christianity was established were done openly, and in the view of enemies, able and willing to have detected the imposture, if there had been any; they were done to establish a scheme of religion, the most opposite that could be imagined to the prevailing prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, and even to the prejudices that had possessed the minds of the very persons by whom these miracles were wrought; and when all the power and authority of the world, as well as the influence and artifices of the priesthood, and every worldly advantage, lay wholly on the other side: and yet vast numbers were

\* Chubb, ubi supra. p. 192, 193.

† Ibid. p. 226, 227.

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brought over to receive a crucified Jesus as their Saviour and their Lord, in that very age, by the evidence of those miracles and extraordinary facts, concerning which they had the best opportunity of being informed, in opposition to all their worldly interests, and their most inveterate prejudices. In vain then it is to inveigh, as this writer does, against the historians, and to pretend, that "they were weak enough to give credit to any relations they might pick up, and had courage enough to put upon the world whatever might be put upon them†:" for the things related by them are of such a public nature, that if they had been false, it would have been the easiest thing in the world for their enemies, of whom there were many, to have detected them; which would have crushed this religion in its infancy. Our author himself is sensible how difficult it would have been to impose facts of so extraordinary and so public a nature, as those recorded in the gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, in the very age in which the facts were said to be done; and therefore, without so much as attempting to offer the least proof, takes upon him to affirm, that the accounts of these facts were not published till a long time after, when there was nobody alive that could contradict them; and he declares as positively as if he could prove it to be so, that they were not made public till the second century, which he represents as an age of fiction and forgery. This is what he particularly affirms concerning the accounts given in the Acts of the Apostles; though it is evident from the book itself, that it was written in the apostolical age, and before the second imprisonment or the death of St. Paul. In the second century, Christianity had already made a wonderful progress through the nations, of which there are unquestionable proofs: and by a strange absurdity he supposes, that the extraordinary facts whereby the Christian religion was attested and confirmed, were not published till that time, *i. e.* that they were not heard of or made public, till long after the founding of the Christian church, though it was wholly upon the credit of those facts that the Christian church was founded. He pretends farther, that the accounts of these things "were kept as a treasure in the hands of believers, not known to unbelievers, who therefore had it not in their

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, p. 194.

“ power to confute them, or detect the fraud\* :” and yet certain it is, that the apostles went every-where preaching the religion of Jesus to an unbelieving world. All those to whom the first publishers of Christianity preached the gospel, and published the accounts of the important facts on which it was founded, were at first unbelievers: and it was upon the convincing assurance they had of the truth of these facts, that they were brought over to embrace it, and of unbelieving Jews or heathens became Christians, or believers in Jesus Christ. And whereas he adds, that “ those facts were not published at or near the place of the performance, but in Greece, Italy, &c. where the people “ could not contradict them;” he seems not to have considered, that all these things were first published in Judea, where the first Christian churches were founded; and that great numbers of Jews were converted in the places where all the facts were done. It was not till after they had been published some years in Judea, that they were made known to the Gentiles. And in all those countries where the gospel was preached, there were vast numbers of Jews, who had a continual correspondence with those in Judea, and went frequently to Jerusalem to the public feasts, and could therefore easily procure information whether those facts were as they had been represented.

I shall not need to make any observations upon what Mr. Chubb hath offered against the accounts given by the evangelists of our Lord’s resurrection: for, as he has only enlarged on some of the same objections which had been advanced by the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus considered*, it may be sufficient to refer to what has been said on this subject in the twelfth letter.

Having considered the attempts made by Mr. Chubb to invalidate the argument in behalf of divine revelation from prophecy and miracles, it will not be improper to take some notice of what hath been offered to take off the force of the argument, which he hath frequently urged, from the wonderful propagation of Christianity, in behalf of its divine original. He acknowledgeth, that “ it is improbable that Christianity should take place, “ and prevail in the world, and to the degree it did, or at least “ that we are told it did, supposing the history of Christ’s life

\* Chubb’s posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 203, 204, 205.

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“and ministry to be a fiction\*:” but then, as if he had granted too much, he observes, that “the present run of Methodism, without any miraculous power attending it, or any external evidence to back it, takes off from the weight and force of the argument †.” He often returns to this, and in several parts of his book seems willing to run a parallel between the progress of Christianity and that of Methodism. But this only shews the strong prejudices of those who glory in the character of free-thinkers, and how forward they are to catch at the slightest pretences for setting aside the evidences brought in favour of Christianity: for in reality there can be no reasonable parallel drawn between the one and the other. There is no great wonder in it, that professed Christians, pretending to a high degree of purity and piety, and to teach true scriptural Christianity, should make some progress (not in pagan and mahometan, or even in popish countries; for I do not find our Methodists take upon them to make many conversions there, but) in a country where scriptural Christianity is professed, and a full toleration allowed. There is nothing in this but what may be easily accounted for, without supposing any thing supernatural in the case. They do not pretend to new extraordinary revelations, nor appeal to any miraculous facts, as the French prophets did; in which case the failure of those facts might easily subject them to a detection: but they build upon the religion already received among us, and only pretend to explain and enforce the doctrines there taught. But the case was entirely different with regard to the apostles and first publishers of Christianity. The religion they preached, and especially the great fundamental article of it, the receiving a crucified Jesus for their Saviour and Lord, was contrary to the most rooted prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles: it tended entirely to subvert the whole system of the pagan superstition and idolatry, and also the pleasing hopes the Jews had entertained concerning a temporal Messiah, who should raise their nation to the height of secular dominion and grandeur: it was holy and self-denying in its nature and tendency, and was designed not to flatter, but to subdue and mortify, the corrupt lusts and passions

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 40, 41.

† Ibid. marginal note.

of men: it appealed to facts of the most extraordinary and public nature, and which could not fail being detected, if they had been false: the first publishers of it were not only destitute of every worldly advantage, but had the most insurmountable difficulties to encounter with: they were exposed to the most grievous persecutions, reproaches, and sufferings, and had all the powers of the world engaged against them; that therefore they should be able in such circumstances to bring over vast numbers both of Jews and Gentiles to the faith of the crucified Jesus, and that the religion they taught should in spite of all opposition prevail, and at length overturn the whole established superstition, which had every worldly advantage to support it; this cannot be reasonably accounted for, without supposing the interposition of a divine power, and the truth of the extraordinary facts on which it was founded.

Mr. Chubb seems to lay a particular stress on the great change which, he pretends, took place in Christianity, whilst in its most primitive state. He affirms, that "the apostles set out upon two principles, which may be considered as the foundation or corner stone of the Christian building. 1. That Christianity is a supplement to Judaism, and therefore was to be grafted upon it; and that the law of Moses was not to be abolished, but still continued. 2. That the Gospel was a favour to be vouchsafed to the Jews only, and that to them only it was to be preached." And he pretends, that "the apostles were unavoidably led into these principles by their master himself:" but that "in a little time they quite changed the original scheme or plan of Christianity, and dug up and destroyed the foundations they themselves had laid:" and then he asks, "How do we know in what instances they may be depended upon? and if they acted wrong in this, how does it appear that they ever acted right\*?" This he returns to on several occasions. But this whole matter is entirely misrepresented: it is plain from several hints given by our Lord himself during his personal ministry, that it was really his intention, and the design upon which he was sent, to erect a new and more perfect dispensation than the Mosaical was, though it was not as yet a proper season to make

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 84, & seq.

a public declaration of it: That his gospel was to be preached not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles; and that the latter were to be taken into his church, and to be made partakers of his benefits, and of the great salvation he came to procure. Any one will be convinced of this, who impartially considers the following passages, Matth. viii. 10, 11, 12. xv. 10, 11. xxi. 43. John iv. 21, 23. x. 16. The utmost that our author's pretence can be made to amount to, is really no more than this: that the apostles, for some time after our Lord's ascension, were not entirely freed from their Jewish prejudices. And supposing, which was really the case, that the Jewish dispensation was originally from God, and was designed to give way to the more perfect dispensation of the gospel, for which it was preparatory, there was a great propriety in it that the change should not be brought about all at once, which might have been too great a shock even to honest and well-disposed minds. The gradual method of unfolding the Christian scheme, and dispelling the apostles' prejudices, instead of being a just objection, shews that the whole was conducted with a divine wisdom and goodness: and their having continued for some time under these prejudices, giveth a mighty force to their testimony, and furnisheth a manifest proof that the Christian dispensation was not of their own invention, nor was owing to a sudden pang of enthusiasm; since it was with such difficulty that they themselves were brought to discern and embrace it, considered in its proper harmony. And it was only owing to the strength of the overpowering light and evidence, that all their prejudices were at length overcome and dispelled.

Besides the two principles mentioned above, Mr. Chubb has thought fit to take notice of a third, which he also pretends was a fundamental principle of Christianity, as laid down by the apostles, *viz.* "That the disciples of Christ were to have one common stock or property, of which the clergy were constituted the trustees and directors:" and he thinks, that "from this it appears, how groundless that pretence must be, that the apostles and ministers of Jesus Christ could have no worldly advantage in view, when they went forth to preach the gospel: whereas nothing can be more evident, than that they had a fair prospect of, and a very plausible pretence for, gathering great riches into their hands, as keepers and managers of the church's property or treasure." This he is so fond of, that he insifteth

upon it for several pages together\*. And the author of the *Resurrection of Jesus considered* had hinted at the same thing before him, to shew, that the apostles were interested witnesses, and that therefore their testimony to Christ's resurrection is not to be depended on †. But all this is built on a false foundation; for there was no divine or apostolical constitution obliging Christians to put their whole worldly substance into the common stock, and to commit it to the apostles as the directors. It appeareth plainly from St. Peter's words to Ananias, that it was a matter which depended entirely on the free choice of the Christian converts, and was the effect of their voluntary zeal and charity; and it was an illustrious proof of the strong conviction and persuasion they had of the truth of the gospel, and of those great and extraordinary facts by which Christianity was supported. This was the more remarkable, as it was at Jerusalem that this was done, soon after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, and the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and where they had the best opportunity of knowing the evidences of those facts. But whatever was done this way, in the extraordinary circumstances in which the first Christians were placed, it is manifest from some passages in the New Testament, and particularly from St. Paul's directions to the Corinthians, that this was not designed to be generally obligatory upon all Christians. See 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2. 2 Cor. viii. 9. And indeed it seems to have been peculiar to those at Jerusalem; for which undoubtedly there were particular reasons: and even there, so far were the apostles from claiming to themselves the direction of the public stock, that they expressly refused to have any thing to do with the management of it, that they might apply themselves to their proper work, the ministry of the word: and it was given into the hands of persons of unexceptionable characters, chosen by the Christian society for that purpose, that they might impartially distribute out of the common stock to those that needed it, Acts vi. 1, 2, 3. If the apostles had been actuated by worldly views, they would certainly have chosen a scheme of religion, more cunningly accommodated to the prevailing humours and prejudices of mankind; for what prospect could they have of persuading people to give up their treasures and worldly substance

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, p. 102—110.

† *Resurrection of Jesus considered*, p. 68.

into their hands, by preaching up to the Jews a person that had been condemned and crucified by the chief priests and rulers of their own nation for their Messiah, and preaching up to the Gentiles a crucified Jew for their Lord and Saviour? Our author himself is sensible of this, and therefore at the same time that he talks of the fair worldly prospect they had, he owns that these prospects must have depended upon their expecting success in their ministry, and upon their being persuaded that they had God and his promises on their side, and that Christ would be with them, as he had foretold, to the *end of the world*\*: so that, according to his own way of stating the case, and indeed according to the reason of the thing, their prospect of success was founded in the firm belief they had of the truth and divinity of Christ's mission, and of his resurrection and exaltation to glory. So inconsistent is this writer's hypothesis, that, in order to make good his charge of worldly interested views against the apostles, he is forced to go upon a supposition of the truth of the illustrious attestations that were given to the Christian religion, and which he elsewhere endeavours to invalidate. And yet, supposing the apostles to have believed what their Lord had told them, they could have no worldly advantage to expect; since he had assured them, that they should be exposed to all manner of reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, both from Jews and Gentiles, and should be *hated of all men for his name's sake*. And this was actually the case: what the apostles got by preaching up the religion of Jesus is in a very affecting manner represented by St. Paul, who was one of them: from whence it is manifest, that never were there any persons exposed to a greater variety of hardships and sufferings, 1 Cor. iv. 9. 11, 12, 13. xv. 19. 30. 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 10, 11. xi. 23—28.

It is particularly evident, that this last mentioned great apostle could have no worldly advantage in view in embracing Christianity. His interests, reputation, and prejudices, lay wholly the other way, and tended strongly to bias him against it. Nothing but conviction, and the power of evidence, could overcome his obstinacy; after which he became the most eminently instrumental to propagate the Christian religion in the world, of which he

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 108, 109.



had been a most zealous persecutor before. And this seems to be the cause of that peculiar rancour and prejudice which this writer every-where discovers against him. The best judges have admired the strength and closeness of St. Paul's reasoning; this particularly was the judgment of one of the best reasoners of the age, Mr. Lockè, who studied his writings with great application. But our author has thought fit to represent him as a *loose unguarded writer*, who did not attend to his own argument, or to the subject. He frequently charges him with drawing wrong conclusions from his premises; and that his epistles were crude, indigested performances, which were *probably sent as they were first wrote, without being revised by him*; and that this sometimes involved him in confusion. He endeavours to give the most absurd and ridiculous turn possible to several passages in his writings: some instances of which were taken notice of above, to which many others might be added. Not content with this, he represents this excellent person, who was no less remarkable for his humility than for his many other virtues, as a vain-glorious boaster, and treats the account which, with a remarkable modesty, and as it were by constraint, he gives of his labours and sufferings, as a *bravado, and past all belief*\*. He accuses him and St. James as guilty of the *most gross and notorious dissimulation and hypocrisy*, and represents him as the great author of *pious frauds* in religion: and that he acted upon this principle, "that truth in some cases may and ought to be dispensed with;" and that therefore he and the other apostles were capable of giving a *false testimony to serve the Christian cause*†. But this certainly was not St. Paul's principle; he has condemned in the strongest terms those who maintained, that it is lawful to lie for the glory of God, and *to do evil that good may come of it*; which is the great principle upon which pious frauds are built, Rom. iii. 5, 6. All that Mr. Chubb has advanced, to prove the heavy charge he has brought against this great apostle, is reducible to two facts. The one is, his saying before the council, that *of the hope and resurrection of the dead he was called in question*, Acts xxiii. 6.; upon which our author observes, that in this "he acted a deceitful part, and coined a lie to save himself, since he was not called

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 364, 365.

† Ibid. p. 92, &c. 235, &c.

“ in question about the resurrection, nor was this any part of “ the charge against him\*.” But that the preaching through Jesus Christ the resurrection of the dead, was one reason of the persecution which was raised against Christ’s disciples; and that this was what particularly excited the rage of the Sadducees against them, of which party the high priest, or at least many of those about him, and who were men of power and interest, appear to have been, is plain from the account given in the Acts of the Apostles, chap. iv. 1, 2, 3, v. 17. And it was very allowable for the apostle to take advantage of this, for creating a division among his adversaries, who were not themselves agreed what charge to bring against him. This is a proof of his prudence and address, and that he did not run upon his sufferings with a blind enthusiastic heat; but it is no proof of his dishonesty. The other instance upon which the charge of hypocrisy and lying against St. Paul is founded, is taken from what he did at Jerusalem, by St. James’s advice, in purifying *himself in the temple*, Acts xxi. 20—26†. But if this had been fairly represented, it would have appeared, that there was nothing in his conduct on this occasion inconsistent with honesty and integrity. What the Jewish Christians had been informed of concerning St. Paul was, that he had *taught the Jews which were among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs*, ver. 21. They represented him as having taught, that it was absolutely unlawful for the Jews to circumcise their children, or to observe the Jewish rites. This accusation was false: St. Paul had not taught this; he only had argued against the necessity of observing that law, and had urged Jews and Gentiles to a mutual forbearance with one another in this matter. And what he did pursuant to the advice of St. James, shewed that he did not look upon it to be then unlawful to observe the Jewish rites; and that he judged it both lawful and expedient in some cases to observe them, for avoiding scandal: and upon this principle he proceeded in circumcising Timothy. This whole matter had been set in a clear light, and the wisdom and consistency of the conduct of St. Paul and the other apostles fully justified, in the answers that were made to

\* Chubb’s posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 330, 331. vol. ii. p. 238.

† Ibid. vol. i. p. 92, 93. 98.

the *Moral Philosopher*. But Mr. Chubb repeats the charge, without troubling himself to take off the force of what had been offered for clearing it.

After what hath been observed, it will be no surprize to find, that this writer represents the being converted to Christianity as of no importance at all, and that he frequently lets us know, that he looks upon all religions to be alike, with regard to the favour of God. "The turning from Mahometanism to Christianity," says he, "or from Christianity to Mahometanism, is only a laying aside one external form of religion, and making use of another, which is of no more real benefit, than a man's changing the colour of his cloaths, by putting off a red coat, and putting on a blue one in its stead\*." He elsewhere represents it as an indifferent matter, "whether a man adopts Judaism, or Paganism, or Mahometanism, or Christianity;" and what is more extraordinary, he would put this upon us, as St. Peter's sentiment as well as his own; and endeavours, after his manner, to prove it from that noted passage, Acts x. 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* He pretends, that St. Peter here teacheth, "that faith in any religious leader, or his ministry, is altogether supernumerary, and that he hath excluded both faith and infidelity out of the case†:" as if the apostle there designed to tell Cornelius, that it was of no manner of importance whether he believed in Jesus Christ or not; which is to make him speak in direct contradiction to the very design of his being sent to Cornelius, and of all his subsequent discourse to him. St. Peter signifieth indeed, in the words cited by this author, that whosoever in any nation, like Cornelius, truly feared and worshipped God, and practised righteousness, should be accepted of him, though not belonging to the Jewish nation, or initiated into the Mosaic polity: but he certainly never intended to signify, that the embracing Christianity was a matter of mere indifference. Cornelius's piety and good dispositions would have rendered him acceptable to God, though he had not heard of Christ; but when he had an opportunity of being informed, that very piety and fear of God led him to receive those significations of the divine

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 33, 34. † Ibid. vol. i. p. 295—302. will,

will, and to believe in Jesus Christ, whom he had sent. The great importance and advantage of faith in Christ, in such a case, is evidently supposed in St. Peter's whole discourse, who was extraordinarily sent on purpose to instruct him in it. This writer thinks proper to find fault with the author of the Acts of the Apostles, for laying so great a stress on the conversion of Jews or heathens to Christianity, which, in his opinion, is "of little consequence as to the favour of God, or their future safety, because, if they were virtuous and good men, they were secure without such conversion, and if they were bad vicious men, they were not secured by it\*." But if they were good men before, and were thereby put in the way of greater improvements in goodness, more fully instructed in religion, raised to more glorious hopes, and furnished with more excellent helps, and more powerful animating encouragements to all virtue and universal righteousness; or if they were bad men, involved in gross ignorance and idolatry, superstition and vice, which was the general character of the heathens when the gospel appeared, and by turning to Christianity were brought to the knowledge and pure adoration of the only true God, and engaged to forsake their evil ways, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; and no other were accounted true Christian converts; this, by the author's own acknowledgment, must have been a signal advantage. He himself had said a little before, "if the revelation referred to could furnish me with useful knowledge, or with a better rule of life, or with more powerful exhortations to the practice of virtue and true religion, than at present I am in possession of, and thereby I should be made a wiser and a better man, than I acknowledge, that such conviction would be beneficial to me in proportion to such improvement †." This is evidently the case of the Christian revelation, wherever it is sincerely believed and embraced, and men give themselves up to its divine conduct; and therefore those to whom this revelation is offered, and who yet despise and reject it, are justly chargeable with great guilt: for it cannot be a slight guilt to reject the valuable means and helps which God hath, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, provided, for promoting our spiritual improvement, and engaging and enabling us to

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 33.

† Ibid. p. 32.

work out our own salvation: nor can any thing be more unreasonable than to pretend, as the enemies of revelation have often done, that because virtue and righteousness are what God approves, therefore faith is unnecessary, and of no consequence at all. The very contrary follows from it: for, if moral improvement and true holiness be of such vast importance, then certainly the best and properest means for attaining to it are very needful, and to be highly valued; and such are the means and helps which the religion of Jesus affordeth, as laid down in the Holy Scriptures: and to reject those means and assistances, under pretence of obtaining the end without them, is a most absurd and criminal conduct, justly displeasing in the sight of God, and a most unworthy return to his infinite goodness.

I shall conclude my remarks on Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, with taking notice of a remarkable passage at the end of the eighth section of his *Farewell to his Readers*. After having done all he could to expose the Scriptures, and shew that it is not safe to appeal to them, he draws this conclusion from the whole: that "this shews the great propriety of our returning back to that prior rule of action, which is the ground and foundation of moral truth, and consequently of moral certainty; viz. that eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong, as to an infallible guide, and as the solid ground of our peace and safety, which rule we are too easily diverted from\*." He seems to speak here, as if Christians, and those that were for adhering to Scripture as their rule, had no regard to the rule of right and wrong, or to the nature and reason of things, which is a gross misrepresentation; and as if the deists were under the conduct of an infallible guide. Particularly it is to be supposed, that he would have it to be understood that he himself hath taken care to follow the infallible guide he recommends: but if we are to judge by the effect it has had upon himself, we have no great encouragement to entertain a very favourable opinion of the advantage we shall obtain by forsaking the Scripture, under pretence of following such a guide. For what is it, that his infallible guide has directed him to? It has inclined him to deny a particular providence, or that God now interposeth in ordering or governing the affairs of men, and the events relating to them,

\* Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 249.

whether

whether with regard to nations or particular persons, and consequently has directed him not to make a dependence on providence, a trust in God, or resignation to his will, any part of his religion: it hath taught him not to expect any gracious assistances from God, or to apply to him for them: it leaveth him at a loss whether it be proper to pray to God at all, and inclineth him to think that it is the safest way to let it alone: nor doth this guide inform him, whether mens souls are material or immaterial, or whether they shall subsist after death, or shall die and perish with the body, or whether there shall be a future state in which God will call men to an account for their actions: or, if there shall be a future judgment, his guide leadeth him to apprehend that it shall extend but to a small part of the human race, and but to a few of the actions they perform; that they shall not be called to an account for the blasphemies they may have uttered against God, or for any neglect of duties that more immediately relate to the Deity, or for private injuries they do to one another, or for any actions at all but those which concern the public; and how far these are to extend, he hath not thought fit to inform us. I cannot see therefore but that it is much better to follow the light the Scripture affordeth us, which giveth us clear instructions in these and other things of great importance, concerning which our author's infallible guide, according to his account of the matter, hath given him no directions at all, or hath given him wrong ones.

I have now finished my observations on Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, which I have perhaps enlarged upon more than they really deserve. But I have chosen to do it, both because they seem to be of a dangerous tendency, and weil fitted to do mischief, and have by some persons been very much extolled, and because there has been no answer, that I know of, given to those books. I do not love to make reflections that seem to bear hard upon any man's integrity: but I think it cannot be denied, that, notwithstanding his great pretences to plainness and candour, and an impartial love of truth and liberty, there are very apparent marks of great dissingenuity in his writings. The nature of this work would not admit of my entering into a more minute examination; but there are few things of consequence in his two volumes which are not here taken notice of.

## L E T T E R XV.

*Observations upon a Pamphlet, intituled, Deism fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated—The Author's pompous Account of Deism, and his Way of stating the Question between Christians and Deists, considered—Concerning the Differences among Christians about the Way of knowing the Scriptures to be the Word of God—The Charge he brings against the Christian Religion, as consisting only of unintelligible Doctrines and uselefs Institutions, and his Pretence, that the Moral Precepts do not belong to Christianity at all, but are the Property of Deists. shewn to be vain and groundlefs—The Corruptions of Christians no just Argument against true Christianity—A brief Account of Lord Bolingbroke's Attempt against the Scriptures in his Letters on the Study and Use of History.*

SIR,

HAVING considered pretty largely Mr. Chubb's *Posthumous Works*, I shall now send you some observations upon a pamphlet, which, though originally written by another hand, is said to have been revised by Mr. Chubb, and to have undergone considerable alterations and amendments: it is intituled *Deism fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated*, and was published in 1746. And as it hath been much boasted of, I shall distinctly consider both the account the author of it gives of deism, and the attempt he hath made to expose the Christian revelation.

In his account of deism he treads in the steps of Dr. Tindal, and it might be sufficient to refer to the remarks that have been made upon that writer's scheme, of which some account was given in the tenth Letter. But let us examine our author's pretensions more distinctly.

He tells us, that "deism is no other than the religion essential to man, the true original religion of nature and reason\*." And because Christian divines have asserted, that the gospel contains the true religion of reason and nature, he represents them, and

\* Deism fairly Stated, &amp;c. p. 5.

particularly

particularly the present bishop of London, and Mr. (now Dr.) Samuel Chandler, as acknowledging, that " deism is the alone excellence and true glory of Christianity," and pretends that what he has cited from them proves, that " deism is all in the " Christian institution that can possibly approve itself to the true " genuine reason of man \*." And accordingly he declares, that " every thing that is enjoined in the gospel to be believed as a " rational doctrine, or practised as a natural duty, relating to " God, our neighbours, and ourselves, is an established part of " deism †." And through his whole book he supposes deism to comprehend every doctrine and precept which is founded in reason and nature, or, as he sometimes expresseth it, in *truth and reason, i. e.* it comprehendeth every doctrine and precept that is true and just and reasonable.

That we may judge of the fairness of this writer in stating the point, it is proper to observe, that the thing he would be thought to vindicate is the religion of those that call themselves deists, and who reject revelation, and oppose Christianity. This is the only deism in question, and which it concerneth him to state and vindicate. But he has thought fit all along to represent deism and natural religion as terms of the same signification; whereas deism, as we are now considering it, is to be understood, not precisely of natural religion, as comprehending those truths which have a real foundation in reason and nature, and which is so far from being opposite to Christianity, that it is one great design of the gospel to clear and enforce it; but of that religion which every man is to find out for himself by the mere force of natural reason, independent of all revelation, and exclusive of it. It is concerning this that the inquiry properly proceeds. Dr. Tindal was sensible of it; and therefore is for sending every man to the oracle in his own breast as the only guide to duty and happiness, which alone he is to consult, without having any regard to revelation: and accordingly he frequently represents the religion of nature as so clearly known to all men, even to *those that cannot read in their mother tongue*, as to render any farther revelation perfectly needless and useless. But if the question be concerning natural religion in this sense, it is far from deserving all

\* Deism fairly Stated, &amp;c. p. 6.

† Ibid. p. 7.



the fine encomiums which this writer, after Dr. Tindal, so liberally bestows upon: he represents it as so perfect, that nothing can be added to it; and therefore will not allow, that Christianity can be said to be "grounded on natural religion, or to be an improvement of it:" for he declares, that he "cannot possibly conceive how an entire and perfect structure (which is the case of natural religion) can be only a foundation of a perfect structure, or how a perfect religion can be improved\*." Here he securely assumes the very thing in question, *viz.* that the religion which every man knoweth of himself by his own unassisted reason is so perfect, as to be incapable of receiving any addition or improvement, even from divine revelation: which is in other words to say, that every man by his own reason, exclusively of all revelation, takes in the whole of religious truth and duty, which is founded in the nature of things, and knows as much of it already as God can teach him: and that a divine revelation can give him no farther light or stronger assurance, relating to any thing that it is proper for him to believe or practise in religion, than what his bare reason informs him of without it.

Among the encomiums which our author bestows upon deism, one is, that it is "no other than the religion essential to man †;" a phrase that he and others of the deistical writers seem fond of. But will these sagacious gentlemen undertake to inform the world what kind or degree of religion is essential to the human nature? Or, if they could oblige the world with that discovery, is nothing valuable in religion but what is essential to man? If revelation discovereth to us some things of importance which we could not attain to the knowledge of by bare unassisted reason; or giveth us farther assurances concerning some things, as to which we were doubtful before, and setteth them in a clearer light; or exhibiteth a more complete system of duty; or furnisheth more powerful motives to animate us to the practice of it; must all these discoveries be rejected, under pretence that what we thus receive by revelation is not essential to man? Might not all improvements of every kind be discarded for the same reason? And so man must be left in his pure essentials. And then what a fine figure would the human nature make!

\* Deism fairly Stated, &c. p. 13.

† Ibid. p. 513.

Besides this general account of deïsm, our author takes upon him to exhibit some fundamental *credenda* of a deïst; and he might easily find a plausible scheme of natural religion formed ready to his hand by Christian writers, and then put it upon the world for pure genuine deïsm. Among these fundamental articles of the religion of a deïst, he reckons the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments. But is this a point in which the deïsts are agreed? Lord Bolingbroke every-where sets up for a deïst of the first rank, and glories in that character, and yet he does all he can to weaken or subvert that which is here put upon us as a fundamental article of the deïstical creed: and Mr. Chubb, who no doubt would pass with our author for a true deïst, though sometimes, like this writer, he makes a great shew of believing not only the truth but the importance of that doctrine, yet in several passages of his *Farewell to his Readers*, and especially in his fourth and fifth sections, where he treats professedly of this subject, setteth himself to shew that it is altogether uncertain, and incapable of being proved, and that the probability lies against it\*. Thus it is that these gentlemen are sometimes willing to make a fair appearance with their principles, till persons are drawn in, and fully initiated in the mysteries of deïsm.

This author gives us twelve propositions with great pomp, most of which have nothing to do with the debate between Christians and deïsts, and others of them are very ambiguous†. In his seventh proposition he layeth it down as a principle, that "to govern our conduct by our reason is our duty, and all that God requireth of us." If the meaning be, that God requireth nothing from us but what we know by our bare unassisted reason to be our duty, and that if any thing farther be revealed to be our duty, we are not obliged to perform it, because we did not know it to be so by our own natural reason independently of that revelation, it is false and absurd: for when God requireth us to be governed by our reason, it must be supposed to be his intention, that we should take in all proper helps and assistances. And if he is pleased in his great goodness to give us additional discoveries of his will and our duty for enlightening and assisting our reason, then certainly we are obliged, and it is what reason itself and

\* See before, p. 220, & seq. † Deïsm fairly Stated, &c. p. 37—40.

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the religion of nature requireth of us, to pay a regard to those discoveries; so as to believe the truths which he has been pleased to reveal, and to practise those duties which he has seen fit to enjoin: and not to do so would be highly criminal.

The four last of his twelve propositions are designed to shew, that reason and nature sufficiently instruct us without revelation, as to the methods of reconciliation with the Deity, when we have offended him by our sins, and give us a certain assurance that God will reinstate us in his favour upon our repentance and reformation. I have elsewhere considered this subject at large in answer to Tindal, who had particularly insisted upon it\*. At present I shall only observe, that though nature and reason seem to direct us to repentance and reformation in case of our being conscious of having offended God and transgressed his holy laws, yet reason and nature could not give us certain information, how far repentance shall be available to avert the punishment we had incurred, or what shall be the extent of the divine forgiveness, or how far an obedience like ours, mixed with many failures and defects, and which falleth short in many instances of what the divine law requires, shall be rewarded. We do not know enough of God, of the reasons and ends of the divine government, and of what may be necessary for vindicating the authority of his laws, to be able to pronounce with certainty, by the mere light of our own unassisted reason, what measures his governing wisdom and righteousness may think fit to take with regard to guilty creatures that have sinned against him. Will any reasonable man pretend, that God himself cannot discover any thing to us, which it may be proper for us to know, relating to the methods of his dealings towards us, the terms of our acceptance with him, or the retributions of a future state, but what we ourselves knew as well before? Or, if he should condescend to make discoveries to us of this sort, and give us assurances relating to matters of such great importance, ought we not to be thankful for such discoveries? especially since it is certain in fact, that men in all ages and nations have been under great anxieties and uncertainties about the proper means of propitiating an offended Deity.

\* The Answer to Christianity as old as the Creation, vol. i. c. 6.

Our author mentions it to the praise of deism, that " it is that religion of nature and reason, which was believed and practised by Socrates, and those of old," whom he represents as having been *ornaments* to human nature\*. Thus he seems to think it a greater honour to be a disciple of Socrates than of Jesus Christ. But why are we to be turned back to the religion of Socrates, who have a light so vastly superior to that which he enjoyed? However he may be justly commended for having attained so far, considering the circumstances he was under (though in many things he fell in with the established superstition of his age and country), is this a reason why we should be sent to that philosopher to learn a right scheme of religion, when we have a far more excellent one in our hands, and recommended by a much higher authority? He was himself sensible of his need of farther assistances, and a divine instructor; and shall we who have that inestimable advantage, despise the light given us from heaven, and be desirous to return to that state of darkness and uncertainty of which he complained, and from which he wanted to be delivered?

The remarks that have been made will help us to judge of those passages in which he pretendeth to give the true state of the question between deists and Christians. " The single question," saith he, " between Christians and deists is, whether the belief of rational doctrines, and the practice of natural duties, are all that are strictly necessary with regard to the divine approbation, and consequently human happiness †?" And again, when he professes to come to the point, he says, " The grand foundation of the difference between the deists and the religious of all other persuasions is, whether any doctrine or precept that has not its foundation *apparently* in reason or nature, can be of the essence of religion, and with propriety be said to be a religious doctrine or precept ‡." Here he supposes, and it runs through his whole book, that nothing can be properly said to belong to religion, but what plainly appeareth to the understanding of every man, without any assistance from divine revelation, to be founded in nature and reason. The question then,

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 5.

† Ibid. p. 7. See also p. 2, 9, 10.

‡ Ibid. p. 14.

though

though not clearly stated by this writer, is this: whether God can make any additional discoveries in relation to doctrines to be believed, or duties to be practised, concerning which we had no certain information by the bare light of unassisted nature and reason? And if God hath made such discoveries, whether it would not in that case be necessary, that those to whom these discoveries are made should believe those doctrines, and practise those duties? Whether, because our own natural reason did not inform us of them without revelation, therefore when they are revealed to us, we may safely and innocently reject them as useless and unnecessary, and as not belonging to religion at all? Or, whether reason and nature do not require it of us as an indispensable duty, to pay a just submission and regard to the significations and discoveries of the divine will concerning truth or duty, in whatever way they are made known to us? These are questions, which one should think would admit of an easy decision; since nothing could be more absurd, than to lay it down as a principle, that God can make no farther discoveries of truth and duty to be believed and practised by us, but what all men know of themselves by their own unassisted reason; or that, if he should, we are not obliged to receive or regard these discoveries.

It is very usual with the deistical writers, and this author among the rest, to put the question, whether reason or revelation be the best guide, as if there were an opposition or inconsistency between them: but the proper question is, whether reason left merely to itself, and with the many frailties, corruptions, and defects to which it is now subject, or reason with the assistance of divine revelation, be the best guide to duty and happiness? Revelation indeed would be of little use, if we were to take his account of it. He tells us, that by "pure revelation must be meant, that which is of such a nature as to be quite out of reason's province to form any judgment about it: That matters supernatural are incapable of an examination by natural reason, or of being approved as reasonable: And that surely no man can be rationally convinced of what lies quite out of the reach of his reasoning faculties to form any judgment at all about\*." This

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 2. 24.

he frequently repeats, and seems to value himself upon this way of putting the case. But it is grossly misrepresented. None of the friends of revelation understand by it, that about which we are not capable of forming any judgment at all: on the contrary, they generally agree that we must make use of our reason, both in judging of the evidences of divine revelation, whereby it is proved to be from God, and of the sense and meaning of its doctrines and precepts. But our author thinks fit to play upon the word *supernatural*; as if by it were meant that which is absolutely unintelligible and absurd: whereas a thing may be so far supernatural, that we could not have discovered it merely by our own reason without a divine revelation, and yet, when discovered to us, we may be able to form a judgment concerning it, and may see it to be worthy of God, and of an excellent tendency, and as such our reason may approve it.

Having considered that part of the pamphlet in which the author pretends to give a fair state and vindication of deism as opposed to revelation, I shall now take some notice of what he hath advanced with regard to the Christian revelation in particular.

He says, "the material question between rational Christians and deists depends upon the proof that is made by Christians, that the Scriptures are a divine revelation, and the very word of God: for if this point be proved, the controversy is at an end." But here he complains of the want of unanimity among Christians, in a point of such importance. "The Roman Catholics say, We know the Scriptures to be the word of God only by the testimony of the church: and among protestants, some say, They are known to be the word of God by *themselves*, to those only whose eyes the spirit of God is pleased to open, to perceive the characters of divine truth impressed on them: others maintain, that they will manifestly appear to be the word of God by themselves, upon an honest investigation of mere natural reason, to any man who shall impartially exercise it about them\*." But if the matter be rightly considered, there is not so great a difference among Christian writers about the way of knowing the Scriptures to be the word of God, as is pretended. Christians in general are agreed, that the extraordi-

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 15—24.

nary facts recorded in the gospel are true, and that those facts prove the divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth and divinity of that scheme of religion which was published to the world in his name. They agree, that the Scriptures contain a faithful and authentic account of the doctrines and laws delivered by Christ and his apostles, and of the illustrious attestations wherby they were confirmed: That they were committed to writing by the apostles themselves, who were eye and ear witnesses of what they relate, or by their most intimate companions, and were published in the first age of the Christian church, the age in which those doctrines and laws were delivered, and the facts were done: That these writings have remarkable internal characters of truth and divinity in the goodness and excellence of the doctrines, the purity of the precepts, the force and power of the motives, that unaffected simplicity and impartial regard to truth which every-where appears, and in the admirable tendency of the whole to promote the glory of God, and the good of mankind, without any traces or views of worldly policy, ambition, avarice, or sensuality. And though some talk of these characters as discernible by the aid of the Holy Spirit, and others by the investigation of human reason, yet neither do the former intend to exclude human reason from having any concern in that inquiry, nor do the latter design to exclude the assistance of the Holy Spirit; since it is generally acknowledged among Christians, and is highly agreeable to reason itself, that it is proper to apply to God, *the author of light, and giver of all inward illumination*, as Lord Herbert calls him, to *assist us in our inquiries*, and, by purifying our souls from vicious affections and corrupt prejudices, to prepare our minds for a due reception of religious and moral truth. I add, that though some have talked of corruptions in the sacred writings, yet Christians are generally agreed, that the Scriptures are transmitted to us without any such general corruption as to make any alteration in the doctrines and facts, and that they are delivered down to us by a credible uninterrupted tradition, greater than can be produced for any other books in the world; by the testimony not merely of the church in one age, but in every age, from the time in which they were written; and not merely by any one party of Christians, but by those of different sects and parties, by friends and enemies. Any  
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one that considereth the several things now mentioned, and which have been often urged by Christians of all denominations, by the best of the Popish as well as Protestant writers, who have appeared in defence of Christianity, will see that there is a more general agreement among them, in what concerneth the proofs of the divine original and authority of the sacred writings, than our author seems willing to allow.

With regard to *prophecy* and *miracles*, which are insisted on by all Christian writers as proofs of the divinity of the Christian religion, he will not allow them to be any proofs of it at all: because they do not prove, that " the collection of tracts commonly called the Bible were written by the persons respectively whose names they bear: that the Deity immediately dictated to each writer the subject matter contained therein: and that these books have been faithfully transmitted down to us without any corruption, alteration, addition, or diminution\*." Mr. Chubb has the same thought, and seems very fond of it, for he has it over and over again in his *Farewell to his Readers*. But if prophecies and miracles exhibited sufficient credentials to the divine mission of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his apostles, who published to the world the doctrines and laws of the Christian religion; and if the Scriptures contain a just and faithful account of those prophecies and miracles, and of the doctrines and laws so attested and confirmed, and delivered by those divinely-authorized teachers; doth not this lay a just foundation for receiving those doctrines and laws as of divine authority? As to their being written by the persons whose names they bear, and their being safely transmitted to us, without any material corruption or alteration, this needeth no miracles to prove it: it must be proved by other mediums, such as by the acknowledgment of all mankind are sufficient to prove things of that kind. If these writings can be traced up, as they certainly may, from our own times, by unquestionable evidence, to the very age in which they were written; and if they have been all along acknowledged to have been written by those to whom they are ascribed, and even the enemies who lived nearest those times never contested it; and if it can be demonstrated, that, as the

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 22. 26.



case was circumstanced, a general corruption of those writings in the doctrines and facts, if any had attempted it, would have been an impossible thing; this ought to satisfy an impartial inquirer: and this is capable of as clear a proof as the nature of the thing can admit, and which, as hath been already hinted, is superior to what can be produced for any other book in the world. And the man that would doubt of such evidence in any other case, would be looked upon as ridiculously scrupulous, and be thought to carry his scepticism to an unreasonable height.

As to the subject matter of the Christian revelation, this writer is for stripping it of every doctrine that is founded in nature and reason; though there are several important doctrines of that kind, *e. g.* those relating to the attributes and providence of God, and a state of future retributions, which Christianity was manifestly intended to confirm and establish, and set in a clearer light. If we are to take his account of it, it consisteth wholly of *speculative, metaphysical, unintelligible* doctrines, which lie out of the reach of reason to determine whether they be true or false, or to pass any judgment at all about them; and of positive institutions, which he pretends by the confession of Christian divines are no *constituent parts of religion\**. By saying they are no constituent parts of religion, he evidently intends, that they have nothing to do with religion, and are of no use or significancy at all: whereas the divines he refers to agree, that the positive institutions of Christianity do belong to religion as valuable instrumental duties, which have a tendency to subserve and promote the great ends of all religion, and are, when rightly improved, of signal use and benefit.

After having observed, that many parts of Scripture are *mysterious* and *unintelligible*, he saith, that to suppose that God *gives forth unintelligible instructions and propositions to his creatures, is to prove him in fact a mere trifler*†. And he urges, that “as certain as a being of perfect rectitude has given a revelation, so certain it is, that not any thing in that revelation can be found on a strict inquiry unrevealed, *i. e.* not understood by men of learning, penetration, diligence, and industry\*.” The def<sup>n</sup>

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 2. 6. 16. 24. 58. † Ibid. p. 26. 34. ‡ Ibid. p.

of this is to insinuate, that if there be any one thing in the bible, even in the prophetic parts of it, which is not understood by men of learning and diligence, the whole is false: or if there be any circumstance in the revelation obscure, it cannot be a true divine revelation. But may it not reasonably be supposed, that in a revelation designed not merely for any one particular age, but for the use of mankind in every succeeding age, as there are many things, and those of the greatest importance, sufficiently clear and intelligible at all times, so there may be some things not well understood at one time, which afterwards are cleared up by farther inquiry, or a more diligent search, or by comparing predictions with events? Or, may not things which are revealed to us as far as it is necessary they should be so, yet have some things attending them, the manner of which we are not able clearly to explain and understand? Is not this the case of many important points of what is called natural religion, relating to the providence and attributes of God, the divine eternity, immensity, omniscience, the creation of the world, &c.? And must we reject what we do understand, and the great usefulness of which we clearly apprehend, because there is something relating to it which we cannot distinctly conceive?

As to the objections he makes against some particular doctrines of Christianity, as unintelligible and absurd, or at least as absolutely useless, this entirely depends upon the strange and unfair representation he has been pleased to make of them. Thus he supposes Christians to maintain it as a doctrine of Scripture, that "an original, uncompounded, immaterial, and pure spirit, should, like one of the derived, compounded, material, human species, have a Son †:" As if Christians understood God's having a Son, in the same gross, literal, and carnal sense, in which one man begets another.

He pronounces, that "the supposed satisfaction for sin by Christ's death, is a doctrine entirely repugnant to reason, and as such ought to be rejected with scorn\*." Mr. Chubb has passed the same censure upon it, which is owing to the absurd light in which he has thought fit to represent it, concerning which see before, p. 238. But the doctrine of our redemption

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 66.

† Ibid. p. 41.

and reconciliation through the obedience and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, considered as taught in the holy Scriptures, hath nothing in it but what is worthy of God, and of an excellent tendency.

He mentions another doctrine, which he owns to be intelligible enough, but represents it as good for nothing, and as of no more consequence to the world in general, than there being a burning mountain in the kingdom of Naples, is an advantage to the people of England. And he thinks "it is greatly improbable, that God should especially interpose to acquaint the world with what mankind would do altogether as well without\*." The doctrine he here refers to is that of God's judging the world by Jesus Christ. But this, rightly considered, is a noble part of the gospel scheme, and capable of being improved to the most excellent purposes. It renders the whole harmonious and consistent, in that the same glorious and divine Person by whom God made the world, and by whom as the great instrument he carried on his gracious designs for recovering mankind from their ruinous and lost estate, is appointed to be the judge of all men, and dispenser of future retributions. And what farther shews the propriety of appointing Christ to be the judge is, that this is the last perfective act of the kingdom and dominion committed to him as Mediator, and that it is to be regarded as a reward of his amazing humiliation and self-abasement, and of his unparalleled obedience and sufferings in our nature, in compliance with his heavenly father's will. To which it may be added, that nothing can be fuller of comfort to good men, than that the benevolent Saviour of mankind will judge the world in the father's name; since it yields a satisfactory proof, that it is the will of God, that the judgment should be conducted, not with the utmost rigour of unalloyed justice, but with great equity, so as to make all proper allowances for human weakness and infirmity, as far as is consistent with unbiaised truth and righteoufness. And at the same time it hath a manifest tendency to strike an awe into the impenitent rejecters of the divine grace and goodness, to consider that they must be accountable to that Lord and Saviour whom they rejected and despised. What a mighty enforcement must it give

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 35.

to his authority and laws, that he himself shall call us to an account as to our obedience or disobedience to those laws, and will have it in his power to fulfil his own glorious promises to them that believe and obey him, and to execute his awful threatenings against the finally impenitent and disobedient!

There are several other things he repeats which are urged by almost every deistical writer, and which I have had occasion frequently to mention, such as the contradictory interpretations put on several passages of Scripture, different translations, errors of transcribers, &c. But that which he seems to lay a particular stress upon is the corruption of Christians. He speaks of the *abominable wickedness that has rode triumphant* in the Christian world: and that "the Americans have too much reason to consider the coming of Christians and Christianity among them as "the greatest evil and curse that ever befel them\*." But if professed Christians have made religion a cover for their ambition, avarice, and cruelty, Christianity is not accountable for this. And whosoever considers the best accounts of the Americans before Christianity came among them; their gross ignorance and barbarity, their human sacrifices, and the abominable vices and customs which prevailed among them †, must be sensible, that if the pure religion of Jesus, as taught in the gospel by Christ and his apostles, had been published and received among them in its genuine purity and simplicity, it would have been the happiest thing that could have befallen them: and the greatest fault is, that little care has been taken to instruct them and the other heathen nations, in the true Christian religion as delivered in the holy Scriptures. (Notwithstanding the corruptions so complained of in the Christian world, it is undeniable, that what there is of knowledge and true religion among men, is principally where Christianity is professed.) But if all were true that is pretended concerning the depravity of those that call themselves Christians, it would only prove, that they are very much fallen from the religion they profess, but not that Christianity itself is false, or was not originally from God. Whilst it can be shewn, as it may be with the utmost evidence, that considered in itself, and as contained in the Scriptures, it is of the most excellent tendency, and

\* Deism fairly Stated, p. 47, 48.

† See Bayle's Dictionary, under the article Leon [Peter Cuccade].

that the uniform design of its doctrines, precepts, promises and threatenings, is to promote the cause of virtue and righteousness in the world, and to reclaim men from vice and wickedness; it is certainly very unreasonable and unfair to make Christianity answerable for the abuses and corruptions it condemneth. If every thing must be rejected which hath been abused, government and civil polity, knowledge and literature, religion, liberty, and reason itself must be discarded.

One of the most remarkable things in the tract we are now considering is, that the author will not allow that the moral precepts of Christianity properly belong to it at all, or make any part of the Christian religion. He pretends, that Christian divines, in order to render Christianity amiable, have decked her with the graceful ornaments of moral precepts; whereas in Christianity the moral precepts are but borrowed ware, the property of the deists, and as much distinguished from Christianity, as Christianity is from Mahometanism. Thus he hath found out an admirable expedient to strip Christianity of what hath been hitherto esteemed one of its principal glories. The holy and excellent precepts which the great Author of our religion taught and enjoined in the name of God, and to enforce which by the most weighty and important motives was one great design of his and his apostles' ministry, do not, it seems, belong to Christianity at all. Moral precepts, according to this writer, make no part of divine revelation, and of the scheme of religion delivered in the Gospel; though to clear and shew them in their just extent, and enforce them by a divine authority, and by the most prevailing motives, seems to be one of the noblest ends for which a divine revelation could be given to mankind. Supposing, which was really the case, that the world was sunk into an amazing darkness and corruption, there was nothing that was more wanted than to have a pure system of morals, containing the whole of our duty with respect to God, our neighbours, and ourselves, delivered not as the opinions of wise men and philosophers, but as the laws of God himself, and enforced by all the sanctions of a divine authority, and by all the charms of the divine grace and goodness. This is what hath been done by the Christian revelation; and its great usefulness to this purpose, and the need the world stood in of it, is excellently represented by Mr. Locke,

Locke, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*\*, quoted at large by Dr. Benson in his remarks on this pamphlet, who very justly observes, that this great man had fully obviated before-hand all that the author of *Deism fairly Stated* hath advanced on this subject.

The last argument he urgeth against the Christian revelation is drawn from its not having been universally spread in all ages and nations. I shall not say any thing here to this objection, which hath been often repeated and answered. It had been particularly insisted upon by Dr. Tindal, and was fully considered in the answers that were made to him. Some notice was taken of it in the observations on Lord Herbert's scheme†. And it may be observed, as Mr. Chubb himself seems to think, that no great stress should be laid upon it; and he will not take upon him to affirm, that the non-universality of a revelation is a just objection against its divinity‡.

Soon after *Deism fairly Stated, &c.* appeared, Dr. Benson published animadversions upon it, in the second edition of the *Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures*, London, 1746: To which there is added an appendix, in which he solidly vindicates the arguments he had offered in his *Reasonableness of Christianity, &c.* against the exceptions of this writer, and charges him not only with false reasonings, but with gross misrepresentations. The same charge is urged against him in a tract published by the reverend Mr. Capel Berrow, though without his name, intitled, *Deism not consistent with the Religion of Nature and Reason*:—"wherein are obviated the most popular objections brought against Christianity, those especially which are urged by a moral philosopher, in a late extraordinary pamphlet, styled *Deism fairly Stated, and fully Vindicated*, in "a letter to a friend—London, 1751." There were other answers to *Deism fairly Stated*, which I have not seen. I shall conclude my reflections upon it with observing, that this pamphlet furnishes remarkable instances to verify the observation I had occasion to make before§ concerning the unfair conduct of the deistical writers, and the strange liberties they take in misrepresenting the sense of the Christian writers whom they quote.

\* Locke's Works, vol. ii. p. 575—579. 4th edit.

† See above, p. 20, & seq.

‡ Chubb's posthumous Works, vol. i. p. 218, 219.

§ See above, let. vii. p. 90. note.

It may not be improper here to take some notice of the attempt made against the authority of the sacred writings in the late Lord Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History*. In some of these letters he hath used his utmost efforts to subvert the credit of the scripture history; but the method he has made use of to this purpose seems not to be well chosen, nor consistent with itself. A principal reason which his Lordship produces to invalidate the credit and authority of the Old Testament history is, that the Greeks were not acquainted with it; and that their accounts, particularly with regard to the Assyrian empire, do not agree with the accounts given of it in Scripture. And yet he himself has taken great pains to shew, that the ancient Greeks were fabulous writers, and that their accounts of ancient times, either with regard to other nations, or their own, are not to be depended on: and accordingly he hath let us know, that if they had perfectly agreed with the accounts given in the Jewish Scriptures, he would have had very little regard to them, and would not have looked upon this to be any argument of their truth. Many learned writers have produced testimonies from heathen authors, tending to strengthen some remarkable passages in the scripture history. This his Lordship finds great fault with, and chargeth it as a most partial and absurd conduct to admit the testimony of the heathen writers, if they happen at any time to agree with the scripture accounts, and to reject their testimony when against them. But if the matter be fairly weighed, there is nothing in this but what is very reasonable: for, considering the strong prejudices of the heathens against the Jews, whose whole religion and policy were so opposite to theirs, it is evident that no great stress can be laid upon what they say against them, and their history; and yet if any thing be found in their writings, which tendeth to confirm the facts recorded in the Jewish sacred books, it is just to take advantage of this; since it is plain this could not be owing to a favourable prepossession towards the Jews, or their histories, but to the force of truth, or to some traditions which they looked upon as authentic. For though the testimonies of enemies are not much to be regarded, when they are to the prejudice of those for whom they have a declared aversion, yet the testimony of enemies in favour of those to whom they are known to be enemies, has been always looked upon to be of great weight.

In

In order to invalidate the scripture history, his Lordship has thought fit to repeat what had been often mentioned by the writers on that side: That the Jewish sacred books were lost in the Babylonish captivity; that there have been such corruptions and alterations in the copies, that there can be no dependence upon them; that there is no proof of the Gospels having been written in the apostolic age; that they were not distinguished from the spurious gospels; that there had been formerly evidence against Christianity, but that it was destroyed; that the Christian clergy, through whose hands the Scriptures have been transmitted to us, were guilty of numberless frauds and corruptions; and that the many differences among Christians about the sense of Scripture shew, that it is absolutely uncertain; and that there is now no certain standard of Christianity at all. These and other objections, which his Lordship hath displayed with no small ostentation, I shall not here take any particular notice of, having considered and obviated them in the *Reflections on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History, especially as far as they relate to Christianity and the Holy Scriptures*, published at London, 8vo. 1753\*. About the same time, the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Clogher published *A Vindication of the Histories of the Old and New Testament, in Answer to the Objections of the late Lord Bolingbroke*: in which he hath both detected and exposed several mistakes his Lordship had fallen into with respect to other ancient authors whom he cites, and hath vindicated the sacred writings against the attempts made in those Letters to invalidate their credit and divine authority.—These, with Mr. Harvey's *Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters, as far as they relate to the History of the Old Testament*, are the only answers I have seen to his Lordship's *Letters on the Study and Use of History*. But we shall soon have occasion to return to this noble Lord, who afterwards in his posthumous works appeared still more openly against the Christian cause, and even against what have been hitherto accounted some of the most important principles of natural religion.

\* These Reflections are to be found in the second volume of this work, to which the reader is referred.



## L E T T E R . XVI.

*Mr. Hume, a subtle and ingenious Writer, but extremely sceptical and fond of Novelty—He proposes to free Metaphysics from that Jargon and Obscurity which has served only as a Shelter to Superstition and Error—His Doctrine concerning the Relation of Cause and Effect examined—He declares, that the Knowledge of this Relation is of the highest Importance, and that all our Reasons concerning Matter of Fact and Experience, and concerning the Existence of any Being, are founded upon it—Yet he sets himself to shew, that there is no real Connexion between Cause and Effect, and that there can be no certain, nor even probable, Reasoning from the one to the other—Reflections upon the great Absurdity and pernicious Consequences of this Scheme—The Inconsistencies this Writer hath fallen into.*

SIR,

**I** NOW send you some observations upon Mr. Hume, an ingenious writer, who hath lately appeared against the Christian cause, and that in a manner which seems to have something new in it, and different from what others had written before him, especially in what he calls his *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*. The second edition of this book, with additions and corrections, which is what I have now before me, was published in London, 1750. This gentleman must be acknowledged to be a subtle writer, of a very metaphysical genius, and has a neat and agreeable manner of expression. But it is obvious to every judicious reader, that he hath in many instances carried scepticism to an unreasonable height; and seemeth everywhere to affect an air of making new observations and discoveries. His writings seem, for the most part, to be calculated rather to amuse, or even confound, than to instruct and enlighten the understanding; and there are not a few things in them, which strike at the foundation of natural, as well as the proofs and evidences of revealed, religion. This appeareth to me to be, in a particular manner, the character of his *Philosophical Essays*:  
and

and you will, perhaps, be of the same opinion, when you have considered the remarks I now send you.

If we were to form a judgment of these Essays, from the account he himself is pleased to give of them, and of his intention in writing them, our notion of them would be highly to their advantage. Having taken notice of the abstractedness of metaphysical speculations, he says, that he has, “in the following Essays, endeavoured to throw some light upon subjects, from which uncertainty has hitherto deterred the wise, and obscurity the ignorant.” He proposes “to unite the boundaries of the different species of philosophy, by reconciling profound inquiry with clearness, and truth with novelty;” and thinks “it will be happy, if, reasoning in this easy manner, he can undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seems to have served hitherto only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error\*.” He undertakes to “banish all that jargon, which has so long taken possession of metaphysical reasonings, and drawn such disgrace upon them †.” And after having represented *all the received systems of philosophy*, and all *common theories*, as *extremely defective*, he promises to “avoid all jargon and confusion, in treating of such subtle and profound subjects ‡.”

That part of these Essays, which I shall first take notice of, and which is indeed of a very uncommon strain, and seems to lie at the foundation of many of those extraordinary things which he afterwards advances, is what he proposes to consider, p. 47, & seq.; where he observes, that “it is a subject worthy curiosity, to inquire what is the nature of that evidence, which assures us of any real existence and matter of fact, beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory.” He observes, that “this part of philosophy has been little cultivated either by the ancients or moderns:” but though it is difficult, it may be “useful, by destroying that implicit faith and credulity, which is the bane of all reasoning and free inquiry §.” After such a pompous profession, one would be apt to expect something extremely deserving of our attention. Let us therefore

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 18, 19.

† Ibid. p. 97, 106, 107.

‡ Ibid. p. 27, 28.

§ Ibid. p. 47, 48, 49.

examine into his scheme, that we may know what it really is; and then our way will be clear to make the necessary remarks upon it.

He observes, that “the relation of cause and effect is necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct in every circumstance and occurrence of human life. Without this, we should never have been able to adjust means to ends, nor employ our rational powers either to the producing of good, or avoiding of evil\*.” And, accordingly, he expressly declares, that “if there be any relation, any object, which it imports us to know perfectly, it is that of cause and effect: on this we found all our reasonings, concerning matter of fact and experience: and by this alone we retain any assurance concerning objects that are removed from the present testimony of our memory and senses:” and that “the existence of any Being can only be known by arguments from its cause, or its effect †.” It appeareth then, that by his own acknowledgment, it is of the highest importance to know the relation of cause and effect. Let us now see what instruction he gives us with regard to that relation.

He absolutely denies, that this relation can possibly be known *a priori*, and asserts, that it entirely arises from experience ‡: that it is this only “that teaches us the nature and bounds of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another §.” But he takes a great deal of pains to shew, that experience cannot furnish a reasonable foundation for such an inference. He had laid it down as a principle, that all arguments from experience can at best only be probable: but he will not allow even this in the present case: he sets himself to prove, that “not so much as any probable arguments can be drawn from cause to effect, or from effect to cause ||:” that “the conjunction of the effect with the cause is entirely arbitrary, not only in its first conception, *a priori*, but after it is suggested by experience\*\*:” that, “indeed, in fact, we infer the one from the other; but that this is not by a chain of reasoning; nor is there any medium which may

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 89, 90.

‡ Ibid. p. 50, 52, 53.

|| Ibid. p. 62, 63.

† Ibid. p. 123, 258.

§ Ibid. p. 258.

\*\* Ibid. p. 53, 54.

“enable

“ enable the mind to draw such an inference \*. The only ground  
 “ of such an inference, is the supposed resemblance between the  
 “ past and future; but that it is impossible any argument from  
 “ experience should prove that resemblance: and yet if there be  
 “ not such a resemblance, all experience becomes useless, and can  
 “ give rise to no inference or conclusion †.” He positively as-  
 “serts, that “ we know only by experience the frequent conjunc-  
 “tion of objects, without being ever able to comprehend any  
 “ thing like connexion between them ‡.” And he frequently  
 observes, that the connexion is only in our own thoughts or  
 conceptions, not in the things themselves; and resolves the con-  
 junction between cause and effect, and the inference drawn from  
 the one to the other, wholly into custom; that it is a “ customary  
 “ connexion in the thought or imagination betwixt one object,  
 “ and its usual attendant §;” that custom, he always calls a *habit* ||;  
 and represents it as owing to a repetition of acts; at other times,  
 he ascribes it to an *instinct*, or *mechanical tendency*, and repre-  
 sents it as a necessary *act of the mind*, and *infallible in its*  
*operations* \*\*: yet afterwards, speaking of the same custom or  
 instinct, he says, that, like *other instincts*, it may be *fallacious*  
*and deceitful* ††.

The great argument he produces, and upon which he lays the  
 greatest stress, to shew that we can have no certainty in our con-  
 clusions concerning the relation of cause and effect, nor reason  
 from one to the other, is, that we have no idea of that connex-  
 ion which unites the effect to the cause, or of the force, power,  
 or energy, in the cause, which produces the effect; nor conse-  
 quently, any medium whereby we can infer the one from the  
 other. He sets himself particularly to shew, that neither exter-  
 nial objects give us the idea of power, nor reflections on the  
 operations of our own minds ‡‡.

If what our author offers on this head had been only to display  
 the subtilty of his metaphysical genius, and shew how little we  
 are able distinctly to explain the manner even of those things of  
 which we have the greatest certainty, we should have allowed him

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 60, 61.

† Ibid. p. 114.

‡ Ibid. p. 73, 74, 91, 120.

†† Ibid. p. 251.

† Ibid. p. 65, 66.

§ Ibid. p. 123.

\*\* Ibid. 73, 91.

‡‡ Ibid. p. 105, 106.

to amuse himself, and his readers, with a little philosophical play. But what he here advances, concerning cause and effect, power and connexion, he makes the foundation of conclusions relating to matters of great importance,

—————*Hæ nugæ seria ducunt*  
*In mala*—————

By endeavouring to destroy all reasoning from causes to effects, or from effects to causes, and not allowing that we can so much as probably infer the one from the other, by arguing either *a priori*, or from experience, he subverts, as far as in him lies, the very foundation of those reasonings, that are drawn from the effects which we behold in the frame of the universe, to the existence of one supreme, intelligent, all-powerful cause; and accordingly we shall find that he himself afterwards applies this principle to this very purpose. Another use that he makes of this doctrine concerning cause and effect is, what we would not have expected from it, to confound all difference between physical and moral causes; and to shew that the latter have the same kind of causality with the former. This is the purport of his eighth essay, which is concerning *liberty* and *necessity*\*: though if he argued consistently, he must deny that there is any such thing in nature as *necessity*, or *necessary connexion*; or that there is either physical or moral cause at all.

You will scarce expect, that I should enter upon a laborious confutation of so whimsical a scheme, though proposed to the world with great pomp, and represented by the author himself as of *vast importance*. I shall content myself with making some general observations upon it.

And first, whereas this writer frequently, throughout these essays, lays a mighty stress upon experience, as the great guide of human life, and the only foundation of all other knowledge, especially with respect to matter of fact, and the existence of objects, he here plainly endeavours to shew, that there can be no argument from experience at all; nor can any reasonable conclusion be drawn from it: for he will not allow, that argument can be drawn or inference made from experience, but what is founded on the

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 129, & seq.

supposed

supposed relation or connexion betwixt cause and effect. If therefore there be no relation or connexion betwixt cause and effect at all, in the nature of things, which it is the whole design of his reasoning on this subject to shew, then all certainty of experience, all proof from it, entirely fail; all experience, as he himself expresses it, *becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion*\*.

Secondly, Another remark I would make upon Mr. Hume's way of arguing is, that it proceeds upon a wrong foundation, and which is contrary to truth and reason, *viz.* that we cannot have any reasonable certainty of the truth of a thing, or that it really is, when we cannot distinctly explain the manner of it, or how it is. The sum of his argumentation, as I have already hinted with relation to cause and effect, is, that we cannot be certain of any such thing as power or energy, because we cannot conceive or explain precisely wherein it consists, or how it operates. But this is a very fallacious way of reasoning. Though we cannot metaphysically explain the manner in which the cause operateth upon the effect, yet we may, in many cases, be sure that there is a connexion between them; and that where there are certain effects produced, there are powers correspondent or adequate to the production of those effects. The mind, in such cases, when it sees an effect produced, is led, by a quick and undoubted process of reasoning, to acknowledge that there must be a cause which hath a power of producing it; or else we must say, that it is produced without any cause at all, or that nothing in nature hath any power of producing it; which is the greatest of all absurdities. He urgeth, that "it must be allowed, that when we know a power, we know that very circumstance in the cause, by which it is enabled to produce the effect." And then he asks, "Do we pretend to be acquainted with the nature of the human soul and the nature of an idea, or the aptitude of the one to produce the other?" But certainly we may know, that there is something in the cause which produceth the effect, though we cannot distinctly explain what that circumstance in the cause is, by which it is enabled to produce it. We must not deny, that there is in the mind a power of raising up ideas, and recalling them, and

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 66.

† Ibid. p. 110, 111.

fixing the attention upon them, because we cannot explain how this is done. The argument Mr. Hume offers to prove, that we can have no assurance of the reality of force or power, *viz.* because we cannot distinctly conceive or explain how it operates, would equally prove, that we cannot be sure that we have any ideas at all, because we cannot well explain the nature of an idea, or how it is formed in the mind. He himself, on another occasion, observes against Malebranche, and the modern Cartesians, who deny all power and activity in second causes, and ascribe all to God; that “we are indeed ignorant of the manner in which  
 “bodies operate upon one another; and so we are of the manner  
 “or force by which the mind, even the supreme mind, operates,  
 “either on itself or on body. Were our ignorance therefore a  
 “sufficient reason for rejecting any thing, we should be led into  
 “that principle of refusing all energy to the Supreme Being, as  
 “much as to the grossest matter\*.” He here seems to censure it as a wrong way of arguing, to deny that a thing is, because we cannot distinctly conceive the manner how it is; or to make our ignorance of any thing, a sufficient reason for rejecting it: and yet it is manifest, that his own reasoning against power or causality, force or energy, depends upon this principle; and indeed, by comparing the several parts of his scheme, there is too much reason to apprehend, that he had it in view to deny all force and energy, and all power whatsoever, in the supreme as well as in secondary causes; or at least to represent it as very uncertain. I think this gentleman would have done better to have said, as a late ingenious author of his own country, “We have no adequate  
 “idea of power; we see evidently that there must be such a thing  
 “in nature; but we cannot conceive how it acts, nor what connects the producing cause with the produced effect.” Chevalier Ramfay’s principles of natural and revealed religion, vol. i. p. 109.

Thirdly, A third remark is, that many of our author’s arguments on this subject are contrary to the most evident dictates of common sense. Such is that, where he asserts, that not so much as a probable argument can be drawn, in any case, from experience, concerning the connexion betwixt cause and effect; or

\* Hume’s Philosophical Essays, p. 117, 118.

from whence we may conclude, that from a similar cause we may expect similar effects\*. Thus, *e. g.* according to his way of reasoning, it cannot so much as probably be concluded from experience, that if a quantity of dry gunpowder be laid in any place, and fire be applied to it, it will cause an explosion; or that if it hath such an effect to-day, a like quantity of powder, the same way circumstanced, will produce the same effect to-morrow. No probable reason can be brought to shew, that that which has had the effect in thousands of instances in time past, will, though all circumstances appear perfectly similar, have the same effect in time future. He grants, indeed, that, in such cases, the mind is determined to draw the inference; yet he asserts, that the understanding has no part in the operation. But surely, when, from observation and experience, we come to know and judge of the ordinary course of nature, the understanding may justly draw a probable argument or conclusion, that from such and such causes, so circumstanced, such effects will follow. This inference is perfectly rational. And it is a strange way of talking, that, even from a number of uniform experiments, we cannot so much as probably infer a connexion between the cause and the effect, the sensible qualities and the secret powers. The reason he gives, is, that "if there be any suspicion, that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, experience can give rise to no inference or conclusion†." But is the probability of a thing destroyed, according to any way of reasoning allowed hitherto, because it is barely possible it may happen otherwise, though there are ten thousand to one against it? Mr. Hume elsewhere, when arguing against miracles, lays it down as a principle, that there is a constant uniformity in the course of nature, never to be violated; but here, in order to shew, that no probable reason can be brought from experience, concerning the connexion of cause and effect, he supposes, that there may be a suspicion that the course of nature may change. Thus this gentleman knows how to assume and alter principles, as best suits his own present convenience. Reason leadeth us to conclude, that the course of nature is the appointment and constitution of that most wise and powerful

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 61, 62, 63.

† Ibid. p. 65, 66.



Being, who made that world, and settled that law and order which he judged fittest and properest; and then reason leadeth us also to conclude, that, except in very extraordinary cases, the same order will continue; and extraordinary cases do not hinder the probability of the ordinary course. So that reason affords a proper medium for a probable conclusion concerning what effects are to be expected. He affirms, indeed, that all inferences of this kind are only the effects of custom or habit, not of reasoning\*. But why is custom or habit here mentioned in opposition to reason, or as exclusive of it? May they not both concur? It is evident that they often go together, and mutually strengthen one another: Custom alone, without reason, is often not to be depended on: but in this case reason gives its suffrage; and, in all arguments in experimental philosophy, reason argues from similar causes to similar effects. It is by reason we draw those inferences, and the inferences are rational. It must not be said, that in this case there is no reasoning at all; but that the reasoning is often so obvious, that it carries conviction by the very constitution of the human mind, which naturally acquiesceth in it as satisfactory. It seems evident, that the great Author of our being hath formed our minds, so as to reason in this manner; and he would not have done this, if it had not been both of great use in human life to make such inferences, and if there were not a real foundation for it in the nature of things. This writer himself owns, that "none but a fool or a madman will ever pretend to dispute the authority of experience, or to reject that great guide of human life: but he thinks it may be allowed a philosopher to have so much curiosity as to examine the principle of human nature, which gives this weighty authority to experience†." But I cannot help thinking, that if we were to judge of philosophy by the specimen this gentleman hath given of it in this instance, many would be apt to conclude, that there is a great difference, and even opposition, between philosophy and common sense; that what is so obvious and apparent to the common sense and reason of mankind, that he is a fool and a madman, who doubts of it, yet in philosophy is not so much as probable.

Another instance, in which our author's scheme is not very

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 73. 74. & passim.

† Ibid. p. 63. 66-reconcileable

reconcilable to the common sentiments of mankind, is, that he says, that "though we learn, by experience, the frequent *connexion* of objects, yet we are unable to comprehend any thing like *connexion* between them; and that there appears not in all nature any thing like *connexion*, conceivable by us; all events are entirely loose and separate; one event follows another; but we never observe any tie betwixt them; they seem conjoined, but never connected\*." But it is evident, that in many cases we have a distinct idea of conjunction or contiguity, as in a heap of sand; and of connexion, as betwixt cause and effect; and the connexion in this case is not merely in our thoughts, as this gentleman is pleased to represent it; but this very connexion in our thoughts is founded on a connexion which we perceive in the things themselves. They are not connected as cause and effect, because we think them so; but we perceive them to be connected, because we find they are so: nor is this owing merely to a custom or habit in our minds, but there is in nature a real foundation for it.

Fourthly, Another remark which occurs to me, upon considering Mr. Hume's scheme, is, that he hath fallen into several inconsistencies and contradictions: and, indeed, it is not to be wondered at, that a man who argueth against common sense, however subtle and ingenious he may otherwise be, should also be inconsistent with himself. I have already taken notice of the passages in which he representeth experience as uncertain, and that not so much as a probable argument can be drawn from it; and yet in his sixth essay, which is concerning *probability*, he shews that experience may not only furnish probable conclusions, but what he calls *proofs*; which he explains to be such arguments from experience, as leave no room for doubt or opposition †. And he frequently speaks of experience in very high terms, as a certain guide. Again, in several passages above referred to, he expressly declares, that in making experimental conclusions, there is no place for *reasoning*; that the inference in this case is entirely owing to custom, and the understanding has no part in it: and yet he elsewhere owns, that there is great scope of *reasoning* in inferences of this kind from observation and ex-

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 120.

† Ibid. p. 93.

perience; and that not only men greatly surpass the inferior animals in this way of reasoning, but that one man very much excels another\*. And he declares, that "all our reasonings are founded on a species of analogy; where the causes are entirely similar, the analogy is perfect; and the inference drawn from it is regarded as certain and conclusive †;" though he had said, that "it is impossible that any arguments from experience can prove such a resemblance ‡." Another inconsistency, which may be observed in Mr. Hume's reasoning on this subject, is, that though he represents the connexion betwixt cause and effect to be only a connexion in our thoughts, not in the things themselves §, yet he asserts, that "there is a kind of pre-establi-  
 " blished harmony between the course of nature, and the suc-  
 " cession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which  
 " the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us, yet our  
 " thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the  
 " same train with other works of nature ¶:" where he seems to suppose, that there is a real connexion in the nature of things, to which the connexion in our minds correspondeth. The general strain of his arguing in several of his essays, seems to be designed to prove, if it proves any thing, that we cannot be sure that there is any such thing as cause or causal connexion in the universe: yet he says, "it is universally allowed that nothing exists without a cause of its existence; and that chance is a negative word, and means not any real power which has any where a being in nature \*\*." Here he falls into the common way of speaking, that every thing which existeth must have a cause of its existence; otherwise we must acknowledge the operation of chance. And he observes, that "there is no such thing as chance in the world ††." Causes therefore must be acknowledged, though we cannot explain the manner of their causality. And he himself, in reckoning up the principles of the connexion of our ideas, distinctly mentions *resemblance*, *contiguity*, and *causation*; and this last he makes to be the most common and useful of all †††: and yet, in the course of his reasoning, he really

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 170, 171.

† Ibid. p. 66.

‡ Ibid. p. 90.

†† Ibid. p. 93.

† Ibid. p. 165.

§ Ibid. p. 123, 126.

\*\* Ibid. p. 151.

†† Ibid. p. 32, 84.

leaves no place for *causation*, distinct from *similarity* or *resemblance*, and *contiguity*. It may be mentioned, as another instance of his inconsistency, that he frequently makes *power* and *necessary connexion* the same thing; and argues, that if there be any connexion between cause and effect at all, it must be a necessary one; for that cannot be called a cause, that is not necessarily connected with the effect\*: and yet, in his Essay on *liberty* and *necessity*, when speaking of the influence of motives upon the mind, he saith, that, “as this influence is *usually* conjoined with the action, it must be esteemed a cause, and be looked upon as “an instance of the necessity which we would establish †:” where he plainly supposeth, that it is not essential to the notion of a cause, that it is infallibly and always connected with the effect; but that it is sufficient, if it be usually joined with it. And to the same purpose, he saith, that “all causes are not conjoined to their usual effects, with like constancy and uniformity ‡.” Indeed, his whole Essay on Liberty and Necessity, though seemingly built upon the scheme he had advanced in his foregoing Essays, with relation to cause and effect, is really not reconcilable to it. In all his reasonings in these Essays, concerning cause and effect, he had argued, that there is no such thing as *necessary connexion*, or indeed any connexion at all, betwixt cause and effect: and upon this scheme, it is idle to talk of a necessity either in physical or moral causes: And yet in his Essay on Liberty and Necessity, he plainly argues upon the supposition of a real connexion; though he will only call it a conjunction betwixt cause and effect: And he all along supposeth the influence of causes, and the power of motives; and that a necessity must be acknowledged in moral as well as physical causes. He would have us to begin the question concerning Liberty and Necessity, not “by examining the faculties of the soul, but by examining “the operations of body, and of brute unintelligent matter §:” And with regard to this, he observes, that “it is universally “allowed, that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a “necessary force; and that every effect is so precisely determined “by the nature and energy of its cause, that no other effect, in

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 93. 103. 151.

† Ibid. p. 138.

† Ibid. p. 154.

§ Ibid. p. 147.

“such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from the operation of its cause\*;” and he expressly asserteth, that “the conjunction betwixt motives and voluntary actions, is as regular and uniform as that betwixt the cause and effect, in any part of nature †.” Thus we see, that he can acknowledge cause and effect, and the connexion betwixt them, when he has a mind to take advantage of this, for overthrowing the liberty of human actions. And he concludes the Essay, with taking notice of the objection which might be raised against what he had advanced, *viz.* that “if voluntary actions be subjected to the same laws of necessity with the operations of matter, there is a continued chain of necessary causes, pre-ordained and pre-determined, reaching from the original cause of all, to every single volition of every human creature. While we act, we are at the same time acted upon. There is no contingency anywhere in the universe, no indifferency, no liberty.” This objection he putteth very strongly ‡; and yet I cannot see, that, according to the hypothesis he had advanced in the foregoing Essays, there can be any just foundation for it: for if there be only a mere conjunction of events, but no causal influence, it cannot be said, that, whilst we act, we are acted upon. On the contrary, nothing is acted upon, nor is there any power, force, or energy in nature. All events are loose, separate, and unconnected, and only follow one another, without connexion; and therefore there can be no continued chain of necessary causes at all. This would be the proper answer, according to the principles he had laid down, if he had thought those principles would bear. But he hath not thought fit to make use of it; but, in contradiction to his own scheme, seems here to admit a chain of necessary causes, physical and moral, in order to lead providence; and plainly represents the objection as unanswerable §.

Thus I have considered, pretty largely, our author's extraordinary scheme; and the observations that have been made may help us to judge of this gentleman's character as a writer, whether it deserveth all the admiration and applause, which he himself, as well as others, have been willing to bestow upon it. We

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays. p. 131, 132.

† Ibid. p. 157, 158.

‡ Ibid. p. 147.

§ Ibid. p. 162.

may see, by what hath been observed, how far he hath answered what he had prepared the reader to expect, *clearness* and *precision*, in his way of treating these *curious and sublime subjects*. He had particularly proposed, with regard to power, force, and energy, “to fix, if possible, the precise meaning of these terms; “and thereby remove part of that obscurity, which is so much “complained of in this species of philosophy\*.”

What Mr. Hume hath offered, concerning cause and effect, puts me in mind of a remarkable passage in Lord Bolingbroke's posthumous works, which I shall mention on this occasion. “Whatever knowledge,” saith his Lordship, “we acquire of apparent causes, we can acquire none of real causality, or that power, that virtue, whatever it be, by which one being acts on another, and becomes a cause. We may call this by different names, according to the different effects of it; but to know it in its first principles, to know the nature of it, would be to know as God himself knows; and therefore this will be always unknown to us, in causes that seem to be most under our inspection, as well as in others that are the most remote from it.” And he represents those “philosophers as ridiculous, who, when they have discovered a real actual cause, in its effects, by the phænomena, reject it, because they cannot conceive its causality, nor assign a sufficient reason why and how it is †.” This may seem to bear hard upon Mr. Hume: but what is more to be wondered at, he hath in effect passed a censure upon himself. He indeed gives a high encomium on sceptical philosophy, in the beginning of his sixth Essay: that “every passion is mortified by it, but the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree. It is surprising therefore, that this philosophy, which, in almost every instance, must be harmless and innocent, should be the subject of so much groundless reproach and obloquy ‡.” But afterwards, in his twelfth Essay, which is of the academical or sceptical philosophy, he gives no advantageous notion of scepticism. He says, that “the grand scope of all the inquiries and disputes of the sceptics is, to destroy reason by ratiocination and argument §.”

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 101, 102.

† Lord Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 541.

‡ Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 70.

§ Ibid. p. 245.

And, speaking of the sceptical objections against the relation of cause and effect, he saith, that "while the sceptic insists upon these topics, he seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction:" and then he adds, that "these arguments might be displayed at a greater length, if any durable good or benefit to society could ever be expected to result from them. For," saith he, "here is the chief, and most confounding objection to excessive scepticism, that no durable good can ever be expected from it, while it remains in its full force and vigour\*." And he had said, that "nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end, over any abstract reasoning whatsoever †:" and if so, I think we may justly conclude, that any abstract reasoning which is contrary to the plain voice of nature ought to be rejected, as false and trifling, and of no real use or service to mankind.

But it were well, if the worst thing that could be said of our author's excessive scepticism were, that it is trifling and useless. It will soon appear, that, as he hath managed it, it is of a pernicious tendency: but you will probably be of opinion, that enough hath been said of this gentleman, and his oddities, for the present.

I am, &c. A

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 253.

† Ibid. p. 71.

## LETTER XVII.

*Observations on Mr. Hume's Essay concerning a particular Providence and a future State—His Attempt to shew, that we cannot justly argue from the Course of Nature to a particular intelligent Cause, because the Subject lies entirely beyond the Reach of human Experience, and because God is a singular Cause, and the Universe a singular Effect; and therefore we cannot argue by a Comparison with any other Cause, or any other Effect—His Argument examined, whereby he pretends to prove, that, since we know God only by the Effects in the Works of Nature, we can judge of his Proceedings no farther than we can now see of them, and therefore cannot infer any Rewards or Punishments beyond what are already known by Experience or Observation—The Usefulness of believing future Retributions acknowledged by Mr. Hume, and that the contrary Doctrine is inconsistent with good Policy.*

SIR,

IT appears from what was observed in my former letter, that few writers have carried scepticism in philosophy to a greater height than Mr. Hume. I now proceed to consider those things in his writings that seem to be more directly and immediately designed against religion. Some part of what he calls his *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, manifestly tends to subvert the very foundations of natural religion, or its most important principles. Another part of them is particularly levelled against the proofs and evidences of the Christian revelation.

The former is what I shall first consider, and shall therefore examine the eleventh of those essays, the title of which is, *concerning a particular providence and a future state*. Mr. Hume introduces what he offers in this essay as sceptical paradoxes advanced by a friend, and pretends by no means to approve of them. He proposes some objections as from himself, to his friend's way of arguing, but takes care to do it in such a manner, as to give his friend a superiority in the argument: and some of the worst parts of his essay are directly proposed in his own person. The  
essay



essay may be considered as consisting of two parts. The one seems to be designed against the existence of God, or of one supreme intelligent cause of the universe: the other, which appears to be the main intention of the essay, is particularly levelled against the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments.

I shall begin with the former, because it comes first in order to be considered, though it is not particularly mentioned till towards the conclusion of the essay. He observes, in the person of his Epicurean friend, that "while we argue from the course of nature, and infer a particular intelligent cause, which at first bestowed and still preserves order in the universe, we embrace a principle which is both uncertain and useless." The reason he gives why it is uncertain is, "because the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience\*." This is a specimen of the use our author would make of the principles he had laid down in the preceding essays. He had represented experience as the only foundation of our knowledge with respect to matter of fact, and the existence of objects: that it is by experience alone that we know the relation of cause and effect: and he had also asserted, that not so much as a probable argument can be drawn from experience to lay a foundation for our reasoning from cause to effect, or from effect to cause. I shall not add any thing here to what was offered in my former letter to shew the absurdity, the confusion, and inconsistency of these principles. I shall only observe, that this very writer, who had represented all arguments drawn from experience, with relation to cause and effect, as absolutely uncertain, yet makes it an objection against the argument from the course of nature to an intelligent cause, that *the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*. What the meaning of this is, it is not easy to apprehend. It will be readily allowed, that we do not know by experience the whole course of nature; yet enough of it falls within the reach even of human observation and experience, to lay a reasonable foundation for inferring from it a supreme intelligent cause. In that part of the universe which cometh under our notice and observation, we may behold such illustrious characters of wisdom, power, and goodness, as determine us, by the

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 224.

most natural way of reasoning in the world, to acknowledge a most wise, and powerful, and benign Author and Cause of the universe. The inference is not beyond the reach of our faculties, but is one of the most obvious that offereth to the human mind. But perhaps what the author intends by observing, that *this subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*, is this: That notwithstanding the admirable marks of wisdom and design which we behold in the course of nature and order of things, we cannot argue from thence to prove a wise and intelligent Cause of the universe, or that there was any wisdom employed in the formation of it, because neither we, nor any of the human race, were present at the making of it, or saw how it was made. This must be owned to be a very extraordinary way of reasoning, and I believe you will easily excuse me if I do not attempt a confutation of it.

Mr. Hume, after having argued thus in the person of his Epicurean friend, comes in the conclusion of this essay to propose another argument as from himself. "I much doubt," saith he, "whether it be possible for a cause to be known only by its effect, or to be of so singular and particular a nature as to have no parallel, and no similarity with any other cause or object that has ever fallen under our observation. It is only when two species of objects are found to be constantly conjoined, that we can infer the one from the other: and were an effect presented which was entirely singular, and could not be comprehended under any known species, I do not see that we could form any conjecture or inference at all concerning its cause. If experience, and observation, and analogy, be indeed the only guides we can reasonably follow in inferences of this nature, both the effect and cause must bear a similarity and resemblance to other effects and causes which we know, and which we have found in many instances to be conjoined with each other\*." Mr. Hume leaves it to his friend's reflections to *prosecute the consequences of this principle*, which, he had hinted before, might lead *into reasonings of too nice and delicate a nature* to be insisted on. The argument, as he hath managed it, is indeed sufficiently obscure and perplexed; but

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 232, 233.

the general intention of it seems to be this; that all our arguings from cause to effect, or from effect to cause, proceed upon analogy, or the comparing similar causes with similar effects. Where therefore there is supposed to be a singular cause, to which there is no parallel (though he much doubts whether there can be a cause of so singular a nature), and a singular effect, there can be no arguing from the one to the other; because in that case we cannot argue by a comparison with any other cause, or any other effect. Except therefore we can find another world to compare this with, and an intelligent cause of that world, we cannot argue from the effects in this present world to an intelligent cause: *i. e.* we cannot be sure there is one God, except we can prove there is one other God at least; or that this world was formed and produced by a wise intelligent cause, unless we know of another world like this, which was also formed by a wise intelligent cause, and perhaps not then neither: for he seems to insist upon it, that there should be *many instances* of such causes and effects being *conjoined with each other*, in order to lay a proper foundation for *observation, experience, and analogy, the only guides we can reasonably follow in inferences of this nature.* He immediately after observes, that “according to the “antagonists of Epicurus, the universe, an effect quite singular “and unparallelled, is always supposed to be the proof of a deity, “a cause no less singular and unparallelled.” If by calling the universe a singular and unparallelled effect, he intends to signify that no other universe has come under our observation, it is very true: but it by no means follows, that we cannot argue from the evident marks of wisdom and design which we may observe in this universe that we do know, because we do not know any thing of any other universe. This grand universal system, and even that small part of it that we are more particularly acquainted with, comprehendeth such an amazing variety of phænomena, all which exhibit the most incontestable proofs of admirable wisdom, power, and diffusive goodness, that one would think it scarce possible for a reasonable mind to resist the evidence. But such is this subtle metaphysical gentleman’s way of arguing in a matter of the highest consequence, the absurdity of which is obvious to any man of plain understanding. It is of a piece with what he had advanced before, that there is no such thing as cause or effect

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at all, nor can any probable inference be drawn from the one to the other; than which, as hath been already shewn, nothing can be more inconsistent with common sense, and the reason of all mankind.

The other thing observable in this essay, and which seems to be the principal intention of it, relateth to the proof of a providence and a future state. He introduces his friend as putting himself in the place of Epicurus, and making an harangue to the people of Athens, to prove that the principles of his philosophy were as innocent and salutary as those of any other philosophers. The course of his reasoning or declamation is this: that “the  
 “ chief or sole argument brought by philosophers for a Divine  
 “ Existence is derived from the order of nature; where there ap-  
 “ pear such marks of intelligence and design, that they think it  
 “ extravagant to assign for its cause, either chance, or the blind  
 “ unguided force of matter: That this is an argument drawn from  
 “ effects to causes: and that when we infer any particular cause  
 “ from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and  
 “ can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but  
 “ what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect: and if we  
 “ ascribe to it farther qualities, or affirm it capable of producing  
 “ any other effect, we only indulge the licence of conjecture  
 “ without reason or authority\*.” That therefore “allowing God  
 “ to be the author of the existence or order of the universe, it  
 “ follows, that he possesses that precise degree of power, intelli-  
 “ gence, and benevolence, which appears in his workmanship,  
 “ but nothing farther can ever be proved †. Those therefore are  
 “ vain reasoners, and reverse the order of nature, who, instead of  
 “ regarding this present life, and the present scene of things, as  
 “ the sole object of their contemplation, render it a passage to  
 “ something farther. The Divinity may indeed possibly possess  
 “ attributes which we have never seen exerted, and may be go-  
 “ verned by principles of action, which we cannot discover to be  
 “ satisfied: but we can never have reason to infer any attributes,  
 “ or any principles of action in him, but so far as we know them  
 “ to be exerted or satisfied.” He asks, “Are there any marks of  
 “ distributive justice in the world?” And if it be said, that “the

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 215.

† Ibid. p. 220.

“ justice

“justice of God exerts itself in part, but not in its full extent,” he answers, “that we have no reason to give it any particular extent, but only so far as we see it at present exert itself\*.” That “indeed when we find that any work has proceeded from the skill and industry of man, who is a being whom we know by experience, and whose nature we are acquainted with, we can draw a hundred inferences concerning what may be expected from him, and these inferences will all be founded on experience and observation. But since the Deity is known to us only by his productions, and as a single being in the universe, not comprehended under any species or genus, from whose experienced attributes or qualities we can by analogy infer any attribute or quality in him, we can only infer such attributes or perfections, and such a degree of those attributes, as is precisely adapted to the effect we examine: but farther attributes or farther degrees of those attributes, we can never be authorized to infer or suppose by any rules of just reasoning.” He adds, that “the great source of our mistakes on this subject is this: we tacitly consider ourselves as in the place of the Supreme Being, and conclude, that he will on every occasion observe the same conduct, which we ourselves in his situation would have embraced as reasonable and eligible: whereas it must evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy to reason from the intentions and projects of men to those of a Being so different, and so much superior—so remote and incomprehensible, who bears less analogy to any other being in the universe, than the sun to a waxen taper.” He concludes therefore, “that no new fact can ever be inferred from the religious hypothesis: no reward or punishment expected or dreaded beyond what is already known by practice and observation †.” This is a faithful extract of the argument in this essay, drawn together as closely as I could, without the repetitions with which it abounds.

I shall now make a few remarks upon it.

The whole of his reasoning depends upon this maxim, that when once we have traced an effect up to its cause, we can never ascribe any thing to the cause but what is precisely proportioned

\* Hume's *Philosophical Essays*, p. 203.

† *Ibid.* p. 230, 231.

to the effect, and what we ourselves discern to be so: nor can we infer any thing farther concerning the cause, than what the effect, or the present appearance of it, necessarily leads to. He had to the same purpose observed in a former essay, that "it is allowed by all philosophers, that the effect is the measure of the power\*." But this is far from being universally true: for we in many instances clearly perceive, that a cause can produce an effect which it doth not actually produce, or a greater effect than it hath actually produced. This gentleman's whole reasoning proceeds upon confounding necessary and free causes; and indeed he seems not willing to allow any distinction between them, or that there are any other but necessary and material causes†. A necessary cause acts up to the utmost of its power, and therefore the effect must be exactly proportioned to it. But the case is manifestly different as to free and voluntary causes. They may have a power of producing effects, which they do not actually produce: and as they act from discernment and choice, we may, in many cases, reasonably ascribe to them farther views than what we discern or discover in their present course of action. This author himself owns, that this may be reasonably done with respect to man, whom we know by experience, and whose nature and conduct we are acquainted with; but denies that the same way of arguing will hold with respect to the Deity. But surely, when once we come from the consideration of his works to the knowledge of a self-existent and absolutely perfect Being, we may, from the nature of that self-existent and absolutely perfect cause, reasonably conclude, that he is able to produce certain effects beyond what actually come under our present notice and observation, and indeed that he can do whatsoever doth not imply a contradiction. This universe is a vast, a glorious, and amazing system, comprehending an infinite variety of parts: and it is but a small part of it that comes under our own more immediate notice. But we know enough to be convinced, that it demonstrateth a wisdom as well as power beyond all imagination great and wonderful: and we may justly conclude the same concerning those parts of the universe that we are not acquainted with. And for any man to say, that we cannot reasonably ascribe

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 125.

† Ibid. p. 131, 132, 141, 151.

any degree of wisdom or power to God, but what is exactly proportioned to that part of the universal frame which comes under our own particular observation, is a very strange way of arguing! The proofs of the wisdom and power of God, as appearing in our part of the system, are so striking, that it is hard to conceive how any man that is not under the influence of the most obstinate prejudice, can refuse to submit to their force: and yet there are many phænomena, the reasons and ends of which we are not at present able to assign. The proper conduct in such a case is, to believe there are most wise reasons for these things, though we do not now discern those reasons, and to argue from the uncontested characters of wisdom in things that we do know, that this most wise and powerful agent, the author of nature, hath also acted with admirable wisdom in those things, the designs and ends of which we do not know. It would be wrong therefore to confine the measures of his wisdom precisely to what appeareth to our narrow apprehensions, in that part of his works which falleth under our immediate inspection. This was the great fault of the Epicureans, and other atheistical philosophers, who, judging by their own narrow views, urged several things as proofs of the want of wisdom and contrivance, which, upon a fuller knowledge of the works of nature, furnish farther convincing proofs of the wisdom of the great Former of all things.

In like manner, with respect to his goodness, there are numberless things in this present constitution, which lead us to regard him as a most benign and benevolent Being. And therefore it is highly reasonable, that when we meet with any phænomena, which we cannot reconcile with our ideas of the divine goodness, we should conclude, that it is only for want of having the whole of things before us, and considering them in their connexion and harmony, that they appear to us with a disorderly aspect. And it is very just in such a case to make use of any reasonable hypothesis, which tendeth to set the goodness of God in a fair and consistent light.

The same way of reasoning holds with regard to the justice and righteousness of God as the great Governor of the world. We may reasonably conclude, from the intimate sense we have of the excellency of such a character, and the great evil and deformity  
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of injustice and unrighteousness, which sense is implanted in us by the author of our being, and from the natural rewards of virtue, and punishment of vice, even in the present constitution of things, that he is a lover of righteousness and virtue, and an enemy to vice and wickedness. Our author himself makes his Epicurean friend acknowledge, that in the present order of things, virtue is attended with more peace of mind, and with many other advantages above vice\*: and yet it cannot be denied, that there are many instances obvious to common observation, in which vice seemeth to flourish and prosper, and virtue to be exposed to great evils and calamities. What is to be concluded from this? Is it that, because the justice of God here sheweth itself only *in part*, and not *in its full extent* (to use our author's expression), therefore righteousness in God is imperfect in its degree, and that he doth not possess it in the full extent of that perfection, nor will ever exert it any farther than we see him exert it in this present state? This were an unreasonable conclusion, concerning a being of such admirable perfection, whose righteousness as well as wisdom must be supposed to be infinitely superior to ours. It is natural therefore to think, that this present life is only a part of the divine scheme, which shall be completed in a future state.

But he urgeth, that the great source of our mistakes on this subject is, that "we tacitly consider ourselves as in the place of the Supreme Being, and conclude that he will on every occasion observe the same conduct, which we ourselves in his situation would have embraced as reasonable and eligible. Whereas it must evidently appear contrary to all rules of analogy, to reason from the intentions and purposes of men to those of a Being so different and so much superior, so remote and incomprehensible †." But though it were the highest absurdity to pretend to tie down the infinite incomprehensible Being to our scanty model and measures of acting, and to assume that he will *on every occasion* (for so our author is pleased to put the case) observe the same conduct that we should judge eligible; since there may be innumerable things concerning which we are unable to form any proper judgment, for want of having the same comprehensive view of things that he hath; yet on the other hand,

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 221.

† Ibid. p. 230.



there are some cases so manifest, that we may safely pronounce concerning them, as worthy or unworthy of the divine perfections. And as our own natures are the work of God, we may reasonably argue from the traces of excellencies in ourselves to the infinitely superior perfections in the great Author of the universe, still taking care to remove all those limitations and defects with which those qualities are attended in us. This is what Mr. Hume himself elsewhere allows in his *Essay on the Origin of our Ideas*. "The idea of God," saith he, "as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own minds, and augmenting those qualities of goodness and wisdom without bound or limit." See his *Philosophical Essays*, p. 24, 25. Since therefore we cannot possibly help regarding goodness and benevolence, justice and righteousness, as necessary ingredients in a worthy and excellent character, and as among the noblest excellencies of an intellectual being, we are unavoidably led to conclude, that they are to be found in the highest possible degree of eminency in the absolutely perfect Being, the Author and Governor of the world. These are not mere arbitrary suppositions, but are evidently founded in nature and reason: and though in many particular instances we, through the narrowness of our views, cannot be proper judges of the grounds and reasons of the divine administration, yet in general we have reason to conclude, that if there be such a thing as goodness and righteousness in God, or any perfection in him correspondent to what is called goodness and righteousness in us, he will order it so, that in the final issue of things, a remarkable difference shall be made between the righteous and the wicked: that at one time or other, and taking in the whole of existence, virtue, though now for a time it may be greatly afflicted and oppressed, shall meet with its due reward; and vice and wickedness, though now it may seem to prosper and triumph, shall receive its proper punishment. Since therefore, by the observation of all ages, it hath often happened, that in the present course of human affairs, good and excellent persons have been unhappy, and exposed to many evils and sufferings, and bad and vicious men have been in very prosperous circumstances, and have had a large affluence of all worldly enjoyments, even to the ends of their lives, and that, as this gentleman himself elsewhere expresseth it,

"such

“ such is the confusion and disorder of human affairs, that no perfect œconomy or regular distribution of happiness or misery is in this life ever to be expected\* ;” it seems reasonable to conclude, that there shall be a future state of existence, in which these apparent irregularities shall be set right, and there shall be a more perfect distribution of rewards and punishments to men according to their moral conduct. There is nothing in this way of arguing but what is conformable to the soundest principles of reason, and to the natural feelings of the human heart. But though a future state of retributions in general be probable, yet as many doubts might still be apt to arise in our minds concerning it, an express revelation from God, assuring us of it in his name, and more distinctly pointing out the nature and certainty of those retributions, would be of the most signal advantage.

I shall have occasion to resume this subject, when I come to consider what Lord Bolingbroke hath more largely offered in relation to it. At present it is proper to observe, that though Mr. Hume seems to allow his Epicurean friend’s reasoning to be just, yet he owns, that “ in fact men do not reason after that manner ;” and that “ they draw many consequences from the belief of a divine existence, and suppose that the Deity will inflict punishments on vice, and bestow rewards on virtue, beyond what appears in the ordinary course of nature. Whether this reasoning of theirs,” adds he, “ be just or not, is no matter: its influence on their life and conduct must still be the same. And those who attempt to disabuse them of such prejudices, may, for aught I know, be good reasoners, but I cannot allow them to be good citizens and politicians: since they free men from one restraint upon their passions; and make the infringement of the laws of equity and society in one respect more easy and secure †.” I think it follows from this by his own account, that he did not act a wise or good part, the part of a friend to the public or to mankind, in publishing this Essay, the manifest design of which is to persuade men, that there is no just foundation in reason for expecting a future state of rewards and punishments at all. Nor is the concession he here

\* Hume’s Moral and Political Essays, p. 244, 245.

† ——— Philosophical Essays, p. 231.

makes very favourable to what he addeth in the next page, concerning the universal liberty to be allowed by the state to all kinds of philosophy. According to his own way of representing it, Epicurus must have been cast, if he had pleaded his cause before the people; and the principal design of this Essay, which seems to be to shew not only the reasonableness, but harmlessness, of that philosophy, is lost: for if the spreading of those principles and reasonings is contrary to the rules of good policy, and the character of good citizens; if they have a tendency to free men from a strong *restraint upon their passions*, and to make the *infringement of the laws of equity and society, more easy and secure*; then such principles and reasonings, according to his way of representing the matter, ought in good policy to be restrained, as having a bad influence on the community.

There is one passage more in this Essay which may deserve some notice. It is in page 230, where he observes, that “ God discovers himself by some faint traces or outlines, beyond which we have no authority to ascribe to him any attribute or perfection. What we imagine to be a superior perfection may really be a defect. Or, were it ever so much a perfection, the ascribing it to the Supreme Being, where it appears not to have been really exerted to the full in his works, favours more of flattery and panegyric, than of just reasoning and sound philosophy.” The course of his arguing seems to be this: That it would favour of *flattery*, not of *sound reasoning*, to ascribe any attribute or perfection to God, which *appears not to have been exerted to the full in his works*. And he had observed before, that “ it is impossible for us to know any thing of the cause, but what we have antecedently, not inferred, but *discovered to the full* in the effect\*.” It is plain therefore, that according to him we ought not to ascribe any perfection to God, but what is not merely *inferred*, but *discovered to the full* in his works. It is also manifest, that according to him there is no attribute or perfection of the Deity exerted or discovered to the full in his works; for he had said just before, that he *discovers himself only by some faint traces or outlines*. The natural conclusion from these premises taken together is plainly this: that it would be

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 222.

flattery and presumption in us to ascribe any attribute or perfection to God at all. And now I leave it to you to judge of the obligations the world is under to this writer. In one part of this Essay, he makes an attempt to subvert the proof of the existence of God, or a supreme intelligent cause of the universe: and here he insinuates, that it would be wrong to ascribe any perfection or attribute to him at all. And the main design of the whole Essay is to shew, that no argument can be drawn from any of his perfections, to make it probable, that there shall be rewards and punishments in a future state, though he acknowledgeth that it is of great advantage to mankind to believe them.

You will not wonder after this, that this gentleman, who has endeavoured to shake the foundations of natural religion, should use his utmost efforts to subvert the evidences of the Christian revelation. What he hath offered this way will be the subject of some future letters.

## L E T T E R XVIII.

*An Examination of Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles—A Summary of the first Part of that Essay; which is designed to shew, that Miracles are incapable of being proved by any Testimony or Evidence whatsoever—His main Principle examined, that Experience is our only Guide in reasoning concerning Matters of Fact; and that Miracles being contrary to the established Laws of Nature, there is an uniform Experience against the Existence of any Miracle—It is shewn, that no Argument can be drawn from Experience, to prove that Miracles are impossible, or that they have not been actually wrought—Miracles not above the Power of God, nor unworthy of his Wisdom—Valuable Ends may be assigned for Miracles—They are capable of being proved by proper Testimony—This applied to the Resurrection of Christ—And it is shewn, that the Evidence set before us in Scripture is every way sufficient to satisfy us of the Truth of it, supposing that Evidence to have been really given as there represented.*

SIR,

I NOW proceed to consider Mr. Hume's celebrated *Essay on Miracles*, which is the tenth of his *Philosophical Essays*, and has been mightily admired and extolled, as a masterly and unanswerable piece. I think no impartial man will say so, that has read the ingenious and judicious answer made to it by the Reverend Mr. Adams, now Rector of Shrewsbury. It is intitled, *An Essay in Answer to Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles, by William Adams, M. A.* That which I have by me is the second edition, with additions, London, 1754. Besides this, I have seen a short but excellent discourse, by the Reverend Dr. Rutherford, intitled, *The Credibility of Miracles defended against the Author of the Philosophical Essays*—"In a discourse delivered at the primary visitation of the Right Reverend Thomas Lord Bishop of Ely.—Cambridge, 1751." These in my opinion are sufficient. But since you desire that I would also take a particular

ticular notice of Mr. Hume's *Essay*, I shall obey your commands, and enter on a distinct consideration of this boasted performance.

Mr. Hume introduceth his *Essay on Miracles* in a very pompous manner, as might be expected from one who sets up in his *Philosophical Essays*, for teaching men better methods of reasoning than any philosopher had done before him. He had taken care at every turn to let his readers know how much they are obliged to him for throwing new light on the most *curious* and *sublime effects*, with regard to which the most celebrated philosophers had been *extremely defective* in their researches. And now he begins his *Essay on Miracles* with declaring, that "he flatters himself that he has discovered an argument, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion; and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures: for so long," he presumes, "will the account of miracles and prodigies be found in all profane history\*."

This *Essay* consisteth of two parts. The first, which reacheth from p. 173 to p. 186, is designed to shew, that no evidence which can be given, however seemingly full and strong, can be a sufficient ground for believing the truth and existence of miracles: or, in other words, that miracles are in the nature of things incapable of being proved by any evidence or testimony whatsoever. The second part is intended to shew, that supposing a miracle capable of being proved by full and sufficient evidence or testimony, yet in fact there never was a *miraculous event in any history* established upon such evidence. The first is what he seems principally to rely upon: and indeed, if this can be proved, it will make any particular inquiry into the testimony produced for miracles, needless.

The method he makes use of in the first part of his *Essay*, to shew, that no evidence or testimony that can be given is a sufficient ground for a reasonable assent to the truth and existence of miracles, is this: He lays it down as an undoubted principle, that experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, and at the same time insinuates, that this guide is far

\* Hume's *Philosophical Essays*, p. 174.

from being infallible, and is apt to lead us into errors and mistakes. He observes, that the validity and credibility of human testimony is wholly founded upon experience: That in judging how far a testimony is to be depended upon, we balance the opposite circumstances, which may create any doubt or uncertainty: That the evidence arising from testimony may be destroyed, either by the contrariety and opposition of the testimony, or by the consideration of the nature of the facts themselves: That when the facts partake of the *marvellous* and *extraordinary*, there are two opposite experiences with regard to them; and that which is the most credible is to be preferred, though still with a diminution of its credibility in proportion to the force of the other which is opposed to it: That this holdeth still more strongly in the case of miracles, which are supposed to be contrary to the laws of nature; for experience being our only guide, and an uniform experience having established those laws, there must be an uniform experience against the existence of any miracle: and an uniform experience amounts to a full and entire proof. To suppose therefore any testimony to be a proof of a miracle, is to suppose one full proof for a miracle, opposed to another full proof in the nature of the thing against it, in which case those proofs destroy one another. Finally, that we are not to believe any testimony concerning a miracle, except the falsehood of that testimony should be more miraculous than the miracle itself which it is designed to establish. He also gives a hint, that as it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of God otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions, we cannot be sure that he can effect miracles, which are contrary to all our experience, and the established course of nature: and therefore miracles are impossible to be proved by any evidence.

Having given this general idea of this first part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, I shall now proceed to a more particular examination of it.

It is manifest that the main principle, which lieth at the foundation of his whole scheme, is this: that experience is our only "guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact\*." You will

\* Hume's *Philosophical Essays*, p. 174.

have observed, from what hath been remarked in my former letters, that this author brings up the word *experience* upon all occasions. It is, as he hath managed it, a kind of cant term, proposed in a loose indeterminate way, so that it is not easy to form a clear idea of it, or of what this writer precisely intends by it. He had declared, that it is only by experience that we come to know the existence of objects: that it is only by experience that we know the relation between cause and effect: and at the same time had endeavoured to shew, that experience cannot furnish so much as even a probable argument concerning any connexion betwixt cause and effect, or by which we can draw any conclusion from the one to the other. He had afterwards applied the same term, experience, to shew that no argument can be brought to prove the existence of one supreme intelligent cause of the universe, because this is *a subject that lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience*; and that we can have no proof of a future state of retributions, because we know no more concerning providence than what we learn from experience in this present state. And now he comes to try the force of this formidable word against the existence of miracles, and to raise an argument against them from experience.

But that we may not lose ourselves in the ambiguity of the term as he employs it, let us distinctly examine what sense it bears as applied to the present question. In judging of the truth of the maxim he hath laid down, *viz.* that experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, it is to be considered, that the question we are now upon properly relates not to future *events*, as the author seems sometimes to put it\*, but to past matter of fact. What are we therefore to understand by that experience, which he makes to be our only guide in reasoning concerning them? Is it our own particular personal experience, or is it the experience of others, as well as our own? And if of others, is it the experience of some others only, or of all mankind? If it be understood thus, that every man's own personal observation and experience is to be his only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact; so that no man is to believe any thing with relation to any facts whatsoever, but what is agreeable to what he hath himself observed or known in the course

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 175.



of his own particular experience; this would be very absurd, and would reduce each man's knowledge of facts into a very narrow compass; it would destroy the use and credit of history, and of a great part of experimental philosophy, and bring us into a state of general ignorance and barbarism. Or, is the word *experience* to be taken in a larger and more extensive sense, as comprehending not merely any particular man's experience, but that of others too? In this case we have no way of knowing experience, but by testimony. And here the question recurs; is it to be understood of the experience of all mankind, or of some persons only? If the experience referred to be the experience or observation of some persons only, or of a part of mankind, how can this be depended on as a certain guide? For why should their experience be the guide, exclusively of that of others? and how do we know, but that many facts may be agreeable to the experience of others, which are not to theirs? But if the experience referred to be the experience of all mankind in general, that must take in the experience both of all men of the present age, and of those in past times and ages, it must be acknowledged, that this rule and criterion is not easily applicable: for will any man say, that we are to believe no facts but what are agreeable to the experience of mankind in all ages? Are we, in order to this, to take in whatsoever any man or men in any age or country have had experience of? and to judge by this how far it is reasonable to believe any past fact or facts of which we ourselves have not had sensible evidence? Even on this view of the case, it might probably take in many facts of a very extraordinary nature, and which have happened out of the common course of things; of which there have been instances in the experience and observation of different nations and ages. And at this rate experience will not be inconsistent with the belief even of miracles themselves, of which there have been several instances recorded in the history of mankind.

But farther, in reasoning from experience, either our own or that of others, concerning matters of fact, it is to be considered, what it is that we propose to judge or determine by experience in relation to them. Is it whether these facts are possible, or whether they are probable, or whether they have been actually done? As to the possibility of facts, experience indeed, or the observation

observation of similar events known to ourselves or others, may assure us that facts or events are possible, but not that the contrary is impossible. Concerning this, experience cannot decide any thing at all. We cannot conclude any event to be impossible, merely because we have had no experience of the like, or because it is contrary to our own observation and experience, or to the experience of others: for, as this gentleman observes in another part of his *Essays*, "the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible; because it can never imply a contradiction\*." And again he says, speaking of matters of fact, "there are no demonstrative arguments in the case, since it implies no contradiction, that the course of nature may change †." No argument therefore can be brought to demonstrate any thing or fact to be impossible, merely because it is contrary to the course of our own observation and experience, and that of mankind, provided it doth not imply a contradiction, or provided there be a power capable of effecting it. Another thing to be considered, with regard to facts, is, whether they are probable: And here experience, or the observation of similar events, made by ourselves or others, may be of great use to assist us in forming a judgment concerning the probability of past facts, or in forming conjectures concerning future ones. But if the question be, Whether an event has actually happened, or a fact has been done; concerning this, experience, taken from an observation of similar events, or the ordinary course of causes and effects, cannot give us any assurance or certainty to proceed upon. We cannot certainly conclude, that any fact or event has been done, merely because we or others have had experience or observation of a fact or event of a like nature: nor, on the other hand, can we conclude, that such a certain event hath not happened, or that such a fact hath not been actually done, because we have not had experience of a like action or event being done, or have had experience of the contrary being done. The rule, therefore, which he lays down of judging which side is supported by the greater number of experiments, and of balancing the opposite experiments, and deducting the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence ‡, is

\* Hume's *Philosophical Essays*, p. 48. † *Ibid.* p. 62: ‡ *Ibid.* p. 176.

very uncertain and fallacious, if employed in judging whether matters of fact have been really done: for the fact referred to, and the evidence attending it, may be so circumstanced, that though it be a fact of a singular nature, and to which many instances of a different kind may be opposed, we may yet have such an assurance of its having been actually done, as may reasonably produce a sufficient conviction in the mind. The proper way of judging whether a fact or event, of which we ourselves have not had sensible evidence, hath been actually done, is by competent testimony. And this in common language is distinguished from experience, though this writer artfully confounds them.

This therefore is what we are next to consider, *viz.* the force of human testimony, and how far it is to be depended upon.

And with regard to the validity of the evidence arising from human testimony, he observes, that "there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators." The whole certainty or assurance arising from testimony he resolveth into what he calls *past experience*. That "it is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the report of witnesses." And he mentions, as grounds of the belief of human testimony, that "men have commonly an inclination to truth, and a sentiment of probity; that they are sensible to shame when detected in a falsehood; and that these ~~are~~ qualities discovered by experience to be inherent in human nature\*." But he might have put the case much more strongly, by observing, that human testimony, by the acknowledgment of all mankind, may be so circumstanced, as to produce an infallible assurance, or an evidence so strong, that, as our author expresseth it in another case, none *but a fool or a madman* would doubt of it. It is a little too loose to say in general, that it is *founded only on past experience*. It hath its foundation in the very nature of things, in the constitution of the world and of mankind, and in the appointment of the Author of our being, who it is manifest hath formed and designed us to be in numberless instances determined by this evidence,

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 176, 177.

which

which often comes with such force, that we cannot refuse our assent to it without the greatest absurdity, and putting a manifest constraint upon our nature\*. Mr. Hume himself, in his Essay on Liberty and Necessity, hath run a parallel between moral and physical evidence, and hath endeavoured to shew that the one is as much to be depended on as the other. He expressly saith, that “when we consider how aptly natural and moral evidence link together, and form only one chain of argument, we shall make no scruple to allow, that they are of the same nature, and derived from the same principles †.”

It will be easily granted, what our author here observes, that “there are a number of circumstances to be taken into consideration in all judgments of this kind: and that we must balance the opposite circumstances that create any doubt or uncertainty; and when we discover a superiority on any side, we incline to it, but still with a diminution of assurance in proportion to the force of its antagonist ‡.” Among the particulars which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument drawn from human testimony, he mentions the contrariety of the evidence, contradictions of witnesses, their suspicious character, &c.: and then proceeds to take notice of “what may be drawn from the nature of the fact attested, supposing it to partake of the extraordinary and the marvellous.” He argueth, that “in that case the evidence resulting from the testimony receives a diminution greater or less in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. When the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other as far as its force goes; and the superior can only operate upon the mind by the force which remains.” This is a plausible, but a very fallacious way of reasoning. A thing may be very unusual, and yet, if confirmed by proper testimony, its being unusual may not diminish its credit, or produce in the mind of a thinking person a doubt or suspicion concerning it. Indeed vulgar minds, who judge of every thing by their own narrow notions, and by what they themselves have seen, are often apt to reject and disbelieve a

\* See concerning this, Dutton on the Resurrection, part. 2.

† Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 144.

‡ Ibid. p. 177.

thing,

thing, that is not conformable to their own particular customs or experience. But wiser men and those of more enlarged minds judge otherwise; and, provided a thing comes to them sufficiently attested and confirmed by good evidence, make its being unusual no objection at all to its credibility. Many uncommon facts, and unusual phænomena of nature, are believed by the most sagacious philosophers, and received as true without hesitation, upon the testimony of persons who were worthy of credit, without following the author's rules, or making their own want of experience or observation an objection against those accounts. And upon this dependeth no small part of our knowledge. Mr. Adams hath very well illustrated this by several instances, and hath justly observed, "that the most uniform experience is sometimes outweighed by a single testimony; because experience in this case is only a negative evidence, and the slightest positive testimony is for the most part an overbalance to the strongest negative evidence that can be produced\*."

Our author here very improperly talks of a *contest between two opposite experiences*, the one of which destroys the other. For when I believe a thing unusual, I do not believe a thing opposite to mine own experience, but different from it, or a thing of which I have had no experience; though if it were a thing contrary to my own experience, provided it were confirmed by sufficient testimony, this is not a valid argument against its truth, nor a sufficient reason for disbelieving it. This gentleman himself hath mentioned a remarkable instance of this kind in the Indian prince, who refused to believe the *first relations concerning the effects of frost*. This instance, though he laboureth the point here, and in an additional note at the end of his book, is not at all favourable to his scheme. He acknowledgeth, that in this case of freezing, the event follows *contrary to the rules of analogy, and is SUCH AS A RATIONAL INDIAN would not look for*. The constant experience in those countries, according to which the waters are always fluid, and never in a state of hardness and solidity, is against freezing. This, according to his way of reasoning, might be regarded as a *proof* drawn from constant experience, and the uniform course of nature, as far as they

\* Adams's Essay in answer to Hume on Miracles, p. 19, 20.

knew it. Here then is an instance, in which it is reasonable for men to believe upon good evidence an event no way conformable to their experience, and contrary to the rule of analogy, which he yet seems to make the only rule by which we are to judge of the credibility and truth of facts.

From the consideration of facts that are unusual, he proceeds to those that are miraculous, which is what he hath principally in view; and with regard to these, he endeavoureth to shew, that no testimony at all is to be admitted. "Let us suppose," saith he, "that the fact which they affirm, instead of being only marvellous, is really miraculous; and suppose also that the testimony, considered apart, and in itself, amounts to an entire proof; in that case there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force in proportion to that of its antagonist\*." It may be proper to remark here, that this writer had in a former Essay defined a proof to be *such an argument drawn from experience, as leaves no room for doubt or opposition*†. Admitting this definition, it is improper and absurd for him to talk of *proof against proof*: for since a proof, according to his own account of it, leaves no room for doubt or opposition; where there is a proper proof of a fact, there cannot be a proper proof at the same time against it: for one truth cannot contradict another truth. No doubt his intention is to signify, that there can be no proof given of a miracle at all, and that the proof is only on the other side; for he there adds, "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience hath established those laws" [he should have said, hath discovered to us that these are the established laws, *i. e.* that this is the ordinary course of nature] "the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined." He repeats this again afterward, and observes, that "there must be an uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit the appellation; and as an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle‡." He seems to have a very

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 108. † Ibid. p. 93. ‡ Ibid. p. 181.

high opinion of the force of this way of reasoning, and therefore takes care to put his reader again in mind of it in the latter part of his Essay. " 'Tis experience alone," saith he, " which gives authority to human testimony; and 'tis the same experience that assures us of the laws of nature. When therefore these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do, but to substract the one from the other — And this substraction with regard to all popular religions amounts to an entire annihilation\*." And it is chiefly upon this that he foundeth the arrogant censure, which, with an unparalleled assurance, he passeth upon all that believe the Christian religion, *viz.* that " whosoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe whatever is most contrary to custom and experience." It is thus that he concludes his Essay, as if he had for ever silenced all the advocates for Christianity, and they must henceforth either renounce their faith, or submit to pass with men of his superior understanding for persons miraculously stupid, and utterly lost to all reason and common sense.

Let us therefore examine what there is in this argument that can support such a peculiar strain of confidence; and I believe it will appear, that never was there weaker reasoning set off with so much pomp and parade.

There is one general observation that may be sufficiently obvious to any man, who brings with him common sense and attention, and which is alone sufficient to shew the fallacy of this boasted argument; and it is this: That the proof arising from experience, on which he layeth so mighty a stress, amounteth to no more than this, that we learn from it what is conformable to the ordinary course and order of things, but we cannot learn or pronounce from experience that it is impossible things or events should happen in any particular instance contrary to that course. We cannot therefore pronounce such an event, though it be contrary to the usual course of things, to be impossible; in which case no testimony whatsoever could prove it. And if it be possible, there is place for testimony. And this testimony may be

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 202, 203.

so strong and so circumstanced, as to make it reasonable for us to believe it. And if we have sufficient evidence to convince us that such an event hath actually happened, however extraordinary or miraculous, no argument drawn from experience can prove that it hath not happened: I would observe by the way, that when this gentleman talks of an *uniform experience*, and a *firm and unalterable experience*, against the existence of all miracles, if he means by it such an universal experience of all mankind as hath never been counteracted in any single instance, this is plainly supposing the very thing in question, and which he hath no right to suppose, because, by his own acknowledgment, mankind have believed in all ages, that miracles have been really wrought. By uniform experience, therefore, in this argument must be understood, the general or ordinary experience of mankind in the usual course of things. And it is so far from being true, as he confidently affirms, that such an uniform experience amounts to a *full and direct proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle, that it is no proof against it at all. Let us judge of this by his own definition of a miracle. "A miracle," saith he, "may be accurately defined, a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposal of some invisible agent." Now our uniform experience affordeth a full and direct proof, that such or such an event is agreeable to the established laws of nature, or to the usual course of things; but it yieldeth no proof at all, that there cannot in any particular instance happen any event contrary to that usual course of things, or to what we have hitherto experienced; or that such an event may not be brought about by a particular volition of the Deity, as our author expresseth it, for valuable ends worthy of his wisdom and goodness.

He cannot therefore make his argument properly bear, except he can prove that miracles are absolutely impossible. And this is what he sometimes seems willing to attempt. Thus, speaking of some miracles pretended to have been fully attested, he asks, "What have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but "the absolute impossibility, or miraculous nature of the event?"\* where he seems to make the *miraculous nature* of an event, and

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 195.



the *absolute impossibility* of it, to be the same thing. And he elsewhere makes an attempt to prove, that we have no reason to think, that God himself can effect a miracle. He urges, that “ though the Being, to whom the miracle is ascribed, be in this case Almighty, it does not, upon that account, become a whit more probable: since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or acts of such a Being, otherwise than from the experience we have of his productions in the usual course of nature\*.” But when once we conclude, from the effects in the works of nature, that he is Almighty, as this gentleman seems here to grant, we may, from his being Almighty, reasonably infer, that he can do many things which we do not know that he hath actually done, and can produce many effects which he hath not actually produced: for an Almighty Being can do any thing that doth not imply a contradiction: and it can never be proved, that a miracle, or an event contrary to the usual course of nature, implieth a contradiction. This writer himself expressly acknowledgeth, in a passage I cited before, that “ it implies no contradiction, that the course of nature may change †:” and he repeats it again afterwards, that “ the course of nature may change ‡.” And as to the extraordinariness of any fact, he saith, that “ even in the most familiar events, the energy of the cause is as unintelligible, as in the most extraordinary and unusual §.” What we call the course of nature is the appointment of God, and the continuance of it dependeth upon his power and will: it is no more difficult to him to act contrary to it in any particular instance, than to act according to it. The one is in itself as easy to Almighty Power as the other. The true question then is concerning the divine will, whether it can be supposed that God, having established the course of nature, will ever permit or order a deviation from that regular course, which his own wisdom hath established: and with regard to this, it will be readily granted, that it is highly proper and wisely appointed, that in the ordinary state of things, what are commonly called the laws of nature should be maintained, and that things should generally go on in a fixed stated course and order; with-

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 95.

† Ibid. p. 66.

‡ Ibid. p. 62.

§ Ibid. p. 114.

out which there could be no regular study or knowledge of nature, no use or advantage of experience, either for the acquisition of science, or the conduct of life. But though it is manifestly proper, that these laws, or this course of things, should generally take place, it would be an inexcusable presumption to affirm, that God, having established these laws and this course of nature in the beginning, hath bound himself never to act otherwise than according to those laws. There may be very good reasons, worthy of his great wisdom, for his acting sometimes contrary to the usual order of things. Nor can it in that case be justly pretended, that this would be contrary to the immutability of God, which is Spinosa's great argument against miracles: for those very variations, which appear so extraordinary to us, are comprehended within the general plan of his providence, and make a part of his original design. The same infinite wisdom, which appointed or established those natural laws, did also appoint the deviations from them, or that they should be overruled on some particular occasions; which occasions were also perfectly foreseen from the beginning by his all-comprehending mind. If things were always to go on without the least variation in the stated course, men might be apt to overlook or question a most wise governing providence, and to ascribe things (as some have done) to a fixed immutable fate or blind necessity, which they call nature. It may therefore be becoming the wisdom of God to appoint, that there should be, on particular occasions, deviations from the usual established course of things. Such extraordinary operations and appearances may tend to awaken in mankind a sense of a Supreme Disposer and Governor of the world, who is a most wise and free as well as powerful Agent, and hath an absolute dominion over nature; and may also answer important ends and purposes of moral government, for displaying God's justice and mercy, but especially for giving attestation to the divine mission of persons, whom he seeth fit to send on extraordinary errands, for instructing and reforming mankind, and for bringing discoveries of the highest importance to direct men to true religion and happiness.

It appeareth then, that no argument can be brought from experience to prove, either that miracles are impossible to the power of God, or that they can never be agreeable to his will; and

therefore it is far from yielding a direct and full proof against the existence of miracles. It may illustrate this to consider some of the instances he himself mentions. "Lead cannot of itself remain suspended in the air: Fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water." Our uniform experience proves, that this is the usual and ordinary course of things, and agreeable to the known laws of nature: it proves, that lead cannot naturally and ordinarily, or by its own force, be suspended in the air; but it affordeth no proof at all, that it cannot be thus suspended in a particular instance by the will of God, or by a supernatural force or power. In like manner our experience proves, that fire consumes wood, in the natural course of things; but it yieldeth no proof, that, in a particular instance, the force of fire may not be suspended or overruled, and the wood preserved from being consumed by the interposal of an invisible agent. Another instance he mentions is, that "it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life: because that has never been observed in any age or country\*:" but its never having been observed, if that had been the case, would have furnished no proof at all that a dead man cannot be raised to life by the power and will of God, when a most valuable and important end is to be answered by it. And if we have good evidence to convince us, that a man had been really dead, and that that man was afterwards really restored to life, (and this is a matter of fact of which our senses can judge, as well as of any other fact whatsoever) no argument can be drawn from experience to prove that it could not be so. Our experience would indeed afford a proof, that no merely natural human power could effect it; or that it is a thing really miraculous, and contrary to the usual course of nature: but it would not amount to a full and direct proof, nor indeed to any proof at all, that it could not be effected by the divine power.

And now we may judge of the propriety of the inference he draws from the argument, as he had managed it. "The plain consequence is," saith he, "and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention, that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to prove."

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 181.

“vours to establish: and even in that case, there is a mutual  
 “destruction of arguments, and the superiority only gives us an  
 “assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains after  
 “deducting the inferior. When any one tells me, that he saw  
 “a dead man restored to life, I immediately consult with myself  
 “whether it be more probable, that this person should ever de-  
 “ceive or be deceived, or that the fact he relates should really  
 “have happened: I weigh the one miracle against the other, and,  
 “according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my  
 “decision, and always reject the greater miracle\*.”

You cannot but observe here, this writer's jingle upon the word *miracle*. As he had talked of proof against proof, so he here talks as if in the case he is supposing there were miracle against miracle; or as if the question were concerning two extraordinary miraculous facts, the one of which is opposed to the other. But whereas in that case one should think the greater miracle ought to take place against the lesser, this gentleman, with whom miracle and absurdity is the same thing, declares that he always *rejects the greater miracle*. But to quit this poor jingle, it is allowed, that the raising a dead man to life must, if ever it happened, have been a very signal miracle; *i. e.* as he defines it, a violation of the law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity. The question therefore is, whether any evidence is given which may be depended on, to assure us, that however strange or extraordinary this event may be, yet it hath actually happened. That the thing itself is possible to the Deity, however it be contrary to the usual course of nature, cannot be reasonably contested: because it cannot be proved to involve a contradiction, or any thing beyond the reach of Almighty Power. For it would be to the last degree absurd to say, that he who formed this stupendous system, or who contrived and fabricated the wonderful frame of the human body, and originally gave it a principle of life, could not raise a dead man to life. It would be a contradiction, that the same man should be living and dead at the same time, but not that he who was dead should afterwards be restored to life: and therefore if it be the will of God, and his wisdom and goodness seeth it proper for answering any very im-

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 182.

portant purposes, he is able to effect it. But then, whether he hath actually effected it, is another question: and here it will be readily owned, that in a case of so extraordinary a nature, the evidence or testimony upon which we receive it, ought to be very strong and cogent.

Mr. Hume is pleased here to put the case in a very loose and general way. "When any one tells me," saith he, "that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact he relates should really have happened." He puts it, as if there was nothing to depend upon but the testimony of a single person, without any assignable reason for such an extraordinary event; and when thus proposed, naked of all circumstances, no wonder that it hath an odd appearance! But that we may bring the question to a fair issue, let us apply to it what our author, without doubt had principally in his view, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Taking the case therefore according to the representation given of it in the holy Scriptures, let us examine whether, supposing all those circumstances to concur which are there exhibited, they do not amount to a full and satisfactory evidence, sufficient to lay a just foundation for a reasonable assent to it. Let us then suppose, that in a series of writings published by different persons in different ages, and all of them incontestably written long before the event happened, a glorious and wonderful person was foretold, and described by the most extraordinary characters, who should be sent from heaven to teach and instruct mankind, to guide them in the way of salvation, and to introduce an excellent dispensation of truth and righteousness: That not only the nation and family from which he was to spring, the place of his birth, and time of his appearing, was distinctly pointed out, but it was foretold that he should endure the most grievous sufferings and death, and that afterwards he should be exalted to a divine dominion and glory, and that the Gentiles should be enlightened by his doctrine, and receive his law: That accordingly, at the time which had been signified in these predictions, that admirable Person appeared: That he taught a most pure and heavenly doctrine, prescribed the most holy and excellent laws, and brought the most perfect scheme of religion which had ever been published

lished to the world; and at the same time exhibited in his own sacred life and practice an example of the most consummate holiness and goodness: That in proof of his divine mission he performed the most wonderful works, manifestly transcending the utmost efforts of all human power or skill, and this in a vast number of instances, and in the most open and public manner, for a course of years together: That he most clearly and expressly foretold, that he was to undergo the most grievous sufferings, and a cruel and ignominious death, and should afterwards rise again from the dead on the third day: And to this he appealed as the most convincing proof of his divine mission: That accordingly he suffered the death of the cross, in the face of a vast multitude of spectators; and notwithstanding the chief men of the Jewish nation, by whose instigation he was crucified, took the most prudent and effectual precautions to prevent an imposition in this matter, he rose again from the dead at the time appointed, with circumstances of great glory, in a manner which struck terror into the guards who were set to watch the sepulchre: That afterwards he shewed himself alive to many of those who were most intimately acquainted with him, and who, far from discovering a too forward credulity, could not be brought to believe it, till they found themselves constrained to do so by the testimony of all their senses: That as a farther proof of his resurrection and exaltation, they who witnessed it were themselves enabled to perform the most wonderful miracles in his name, and by power derived from him, and were endued with the most extraordinary gifts and powers, that they might spread his religion through the world, amidst the greatest oppositions and discouragements: That accordingly this religion, though propagated by the seemingly meanest and most unlikely instruments, and not only destitute of all worldly advantages, but directly opposite to the prevailing superstitions, prejudices, and vices both of Jews and Gentiles, and though it exposed its publishers and followers to all manner of reproaches, persecutions, and sufferings, yet in that very age made the most surprising progress; in consequence of which the religion of Jesus was established in a considerable part of the world, and so continueth unto this day.

Such is the view of the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus; and, taking it altogether, it forms such a concatenation of proofs,

as is every way suitable to the importance of the fact, and which was never equalled in any other case. To suppose all this evidence to have been given in attestation to a falsehood, involveth in it the most palpable absurdities. It is to suppose, either that God would employ his own prescience and power to give testimony to an impostor, by a series of the most illustrious prophecies and numerous uncontrolled miracles; or, that good beings, superior to man, would extraordinarily interpose for the same purpose, to countenance and derive credit to a person falsely pretending to be sent from God, and feigning to act in his name; or, that evil spirits would use all their arts and their power to attest and confirm a religion, the manifest tendency of which was to destroy idolatry, superstition, and vice, wherever it was sincerely believed and embraced, and to recover mankind to holiness and happiness; which is a contradiction to their very nature and character: It is to suppose, that a number of persons would combine in attesting falsehoods, in favour of a person who they knew had deceived them, and of a religion contrary to their most inveterate and favourite prejudices, and by which they had a prospect of gaining nothing but misery, reproach, sufferings, and death; which is absolutely contrary to all the principles and passions of the human nature: It is to suppose, that persons of the greatest simplicity and plainness would act the part of the vilest impostors; or, that men who were so bad, so false, and impious, as to be capable of carrying on a series of the most solemn impositions in the name of God himself, would, at the hazard of all that is dear to men, and in manifest opposition to all their worldly interests, endeavour to bring over the nations to embrace a holy and self-denying institution; or, that they were enthusiasts, who were carried away by the heat of their own distempered brains to imagine, that for a series of years together the most extraordinary facts were done before their eyes, though no such things were done at all, and that they were themselves enabled actually to perform the most wonderful works in the most open and public manner, though they performed no such works: It is to suppose, that such mad enthusiasts, who were also mean and contemptible in their condition, and for the most part ignorant and illiterate, were not only capable of forming the noblest scheme of religion which was ever published to mankind, but were able to overcome all the learning,

ing, wealth, power, eloquence of the world, all the bigotry and superstition of the nations, all the influence and artifices of the priests, all the power and authority of the magistrates: That they did this by only alledging, that they had a commission in the name of a person who had been crucified, whom they affirmed, but without giving any proof of it, to have been risen from the dead, and to be exalted as the Saviour and Lord of mankind: All this is such a complication of absurdities, as cannot be admitted but upon principles that are absolutely abhorrent to the common sense and reason of men. It were easy to enlarge farther on this subject; but this may suffice at present, especially considering that Mr. Adams hath urged many things to this purpose with great clearness and force, in his answer to Mr. Hume's Essay, p. 31—36. And what is there to oppose to all this? Nothing but the single difficulty of restoring a dead man to life, which is indeed a very extraordinary and miraculous event, but is not above the power of God to effect, and, supposing a good and valid reason can be assigned for it worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, involveth in it no absurdity at all. And such a reason it certainly was, to give an illustrious attestation to the divine mission of the holy Jesus, and to the divine original of the most excellent dispensation of religion that was ever published among men. To talk, as this author does, of the diminution of the evidence in proportion to the difficulty of the case, is trifling: for the evidence is here supposed to be fully proportioned to the difficulty and importance of the case; since there is both a power assigned every way able to effect it, and a valuable end, which makes it reasonable to think it was becoming the divine wisdom and goodness to interpose for effecting it.

You will perhaps think this may be sufficient with regard to the first part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*. In my next I shall endeavour to make it appear, that we have the highest reason to think, that the evidence, which hath been argued to be sufficient if given, was really and actually given: and shall answer the several considerations he hath offered to shew, that supposing miracles capable of being proved by evidence or testimony, yet no evidence was ever actually given for miracles, which can be reasonably depended upon.



## L E T T E R   X I X .

*Reflections on the second Part of Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles, which is designed to shew, that in fact there never was a miraculous Event established upon such Evidence as can be depended on—What he offers, concerning the necessary Conditions and Qualifications of Witnesses in the Case of Miracles, considered—It is shewn, that the Witnesses to the Miracles in Proof of Christianity had all the Conditions and Qualifications that can be required to render any Testimony good and valid—Concerning the Proneness of Mankind in all Ages to believe Wonders, especially in Matters of Religion—This no Reason for rejecting all Miracles without farther Examination—The Miracles wrought in Proof of Christianity not done in an ignorant and barbarous Age—His Pretence, that different Miracles wrought in favour of different Religions destroy one another, and shew that none of them are true—The Absurdity of this Way of Reasoning shewn—Instances produced by him of Miracles well attested, and which yet ought to be rejected as false and incredible—A particular Examination of what he hath offered concerning the Miracles attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and which he pretends much surpass those of our Saviour in Credit and Authority.*

S I R,

**I** NOW proceed to consider the second part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*. The first was designed to shew, that miracles are incapable of being proved by any evidence whatsoever, and that no evidence or testimony that could be given, let us suppose it ever so full and strong, would be a sufficient ground for believing the truth and existence of miracles. And now in his second part he proceeds to shew, that supposing a miracle capable of being proved by full and sufficient evidence or testimony, yet in fact there never was a *miraculous event* in any history established upon such evidence as can reasonably be depended upon. To this purpose he offereth several considerations. The first is designed to prove, that no witnesses have ever been produced

duced for any miracle, which have all the necessary conditions and qualifications, to render their testimony credible. The second consideration is drawn from the proneness there has been in mankind in all ages to believe wonders; and the more for their being absurd and incredible; especially in matters of religion; and that therefore in this case all men of sense should reject them without farther examination. His third observation is, that they are always found to abound most among ignorant and barbarous nations. His fourth observation is drawn from the opposite miracles wrought in different religions, which destroy one another; so that there is no miracle wrought, but what is opposed by an infinite number of others. He then goes on to give an account of some miraculous facts which seem to be well attested, and yet are to be rejected as false and incredible. This is the substance of this part of his Essay, which he concludes with an insolent boast, as if he thought he had so clearly demonstrated what he undertook, that no man who had not his *understanding* miraculously subverted could oppose it. But I apprehend it will appear, upon a distinct examination of what he hath offered, that there is little ground for such confident boasting.

The principal consideration is that which he hath mentioned in the first place, drawn from the want of competent testimony to ascertain the truth of miraculous facts. He affirms, "that there is not to be found in all history any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestionable good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: all which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men\*."

Here he supposes, that where these circumstances concur, we may have *full assurance in the testimony of men* concerning the

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 183.

facts they relate, however extraordinary and unusual. Let us therefore examine the conditions and qualifications he insists upon, as necessary to render a testimony good and valid, and apply them to the testimony of the witnesses of Christianity, and the extraordinary miraculous facts whereby it was confirmed, especially that of our Saviour's resurrection.

The first thing he insisteth upon is, that the miracle should be *attested by a sufficient number of men*. He hath not told us what number of witnesses he takes to be sufficient in such a case. In some cases very few may be sufficient: yea, a single evidence may be so circumstanced as to produce a sufficient assurance and conviction in the mind, even concerning a fact of an extraordinary nature: though where there is a concurrence of many good witnesses, it is undoubtedly an advantage, and tendeth to give farther force to the evidence. And as to this, Christianity hath all the advantages, that can reasonably be desired. All the apostles were the authorized witnesses of the principal facts by which Christianity is attested: so were the seventy disciples, and the hundred-and-twenty, mentioned Acts ii. 15. 21, 22. who had been with Jesus from the commencement of his personal ministry to his ascension into heaven: to which might be added many others who had seen his illustrious miracles, as well as heard his excellent instructions. The accounts of these things were published in that very age, and the facts were represented as having been done, and the discourses as having been delivered, in the presence of multitudes; so that in effect they appealed to thousands in Judea, Jerusalem, and Galilee. It is true, that as to the resurrection of Christ, this was not a fact done before all the people; but there was a number of witnesses to it, sufficient to attest any fact. Christ shewed himself alive after his passion to several persons at different times; whose testimony give mutual support and force to one another. He shewed himself also to all the apostles in a body, to several other disciples, and at last to five hundred at once. To which it may be added, that all the extraordinary facts and wonderful works wrought by the apostles and first publishers of Christianity, many of which were of a very public nature, and done in the view of multitudes, came in aid of their testimony.

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As to the qualifications of the witnesses, the first thing he requireth is, that "they should be of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves." The reason why this gentleman here mentioneth *learning* and *education*, as necessary qualifications in witnesses, is evident. It is undoubtedly with a view to exclude the apostles, who, except St. Paul, appear not to have been persons of education and learning. But no court of judicature, in inquiring into facts, looks upon it to be necessary that the persons giving testimony to the truth of those facts should be persons who had a learned education: it is sufficient, if they appear to be persons of sound sense and honest characters, and that the facts were such as they had an opportunity of being well acquainted with. And thus it was with regard to the first witnesses of Christianity. They were not indeed persons eminent for their learning, knowledge, and experience in the world: if they had been so, this might probably have been regarded as a suspicious circumstance, as if they had themselves laid the scheme, and it was the effect of their own art and contrivance. But they were persons of plain sense, and sound understanding, and perfectly acquainted with the facts they relate. This sufficiently appeareth from their writings, and the accounts they have left us. Their narrations are plain and consistent, delivered in a simple unaffected stile, without any pomp of words, or ostentation of eloquence or literature on the one hand, and on the other without any of the rants of enthusiasm. All is calm, cool, and sedate, the argument of a composed spirit. There is nothing that betrayeth an over-heated imagination: nor do they ever fly out into passionate exclamations, even where the subject might seem to warrant it. The facts they relate were of such a nature, and so circumstanced, that they could not themselves be deceived in them, supposing they had their senses, or be made to believe they were done before their eyes when they were not done. This must be acknowledged as to the facts done during Christ's personal ministry. For they were constantly with him in his going out and coming in, and had an opportunity of observing those facts in all their circumstances for a course of years together; and therefore could be as perfectly assured of them, as any man can be of any facts whatsoever, which he himself hears and sees. And as to his resurrection, they were not  
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forward rashly to give credit to it by an enthusiastic heat: they examined it scrupulously, and would not receive it, till compelled by irresistible evidence, and by the testimony of all their senses.

The next thing he insisteth upon is, that "the witnesses should be of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others." Apply this to the witnesses of the miraculous facts whereby Christianity was attested, and it will appear, that never were there persons who were more remote from all reasonable suspicion of fraud, or a design to impose falsehoods upon mankind. They appeared by their whole temper and conduct to be persons of great probity and unaffected simplicity, strangers to artful cunning, and the refinements of human policy. It mightily strengthens this when it is considered, that, as the case was circumstanced, they could have no temptation to endeavour to impose these things upon the world if they had not been true, but had the strongest inducements to the contrary. They could have no prospect of serving their worldly interest, or answering the ends of ambition, by preaching up a religion, contrary to all the prevailing passions and prejudices of Jews and Gentiles, a principal article of which was salvation through a crucified Jesus. They could scarce have had a reasonable expectation of gaining so much as a single proselyte, to so absurd and foolish a scheme, as it must have been, supposing they had known that all was false, and that Jesus had never risen at all. How could it have been expected in such a case, that they should be able to persuade the Jews to receive for their Messiah, one that had been put to an ignominious death by the heads of their nation, as an impostor and deceiver? or, that they should persuade the Gentiles to acknowledge and worship a crucified Jew for their Lord, in preference to their long-adored deities, and to abandon all their darling superstitions for a strict and self-denying discipline? The only thing that can be pretended as a possible inducement to them, to endeavour to impose upon mankind, is what this writer afterwards mentions. "What greater temptation," saith he, "than to appear a missionary, a prophet, and ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many dangers and difficulties, to attain so sublime a character? or, if persuaded of it himself, would scruple a pious fraud in prof-

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“pect of so holy an end\*?” But there is no room for such a suspicion in the case we are now considering. If they had pretended a revelation in favour of a Messiah, suited to the Jewish carnal notions and prejudices, who was to erect a mighty worldly dominion, arrayed with all the pomp of secular glory and grandeur, they might have expected honour and applause in being looked upon as his ministers. But what honour could they propose, from being regarded as the disciples and apostles of one that had been condemned, and put to a shameful death by public authority? To set up as his ambassadors, and pretend to be inspired by his spirit, and to be commissioned by him to go through the world, preaching up Jesus Christ, and him crucified; this was in all appearance the readiest way they could take to expose themselves to general scorn, derision, and reproach: and they must have been absolutely out of their senses, to have expected, that any veneration should be paid to them under this character, supposing they had no other proof to bring of their crucified master’s being risen, and exalted in glory as the universal Lord and Saviour, but their own word. Thus it appears, that they could have no inducements or temptations, according to all the principles or motives that usually work upon the human mind, to attempt to impose this scheme of religion, and the facts by which it was supported, if they had known them to be false: and if they had been false, they must have known them to be so. But this is not all. They had the strongest possible inducements to the contrary. The scheme of religion they preached, and which these facts were designed to attest, was directly opposite to their own most rooted prejudices. On the supposition of Christ’s not having risen, they must have been sensible that he had deceived them; that the promises and predictions with which he had amused them were false; and that consequently they could have no hopes from him, either in this world or in the next. At the same time they could not but foresee, that by pretending he was risen from the dead, and setting him up for the Messiah after he had been crucified, they should incur the indignation of the body of their own nation, and the hatred and contempt of those in chief authority among them. They could not possibly expect any thing but what they

\* Hume’s Philosophical Essays, p. 200.

met with, persecutions, reproaches, shame, and sufferings, both from Jews and Gentiles. Their exposing themselves to these things may be accounted for, if they were persuaded that what they witnessed was really true, though even in that case it required great virtue and constancy, and divine supports. But that they should, in manifest opposition to their own religious prejudices and worldly interests, without the least prospect of any thing to be gained by it here or hereafter, persist to the very death in attesting a falsehood, known by themselves to be so; and that they should, for the sake of one who they knew had deceived them, expose themselves to the greatest evils and sufferings, to which all men have naturally the strongest aversion, is a supposition that cannot be admitted with the least appearance of reason, as being absolutely subversive of all the principles and passions of human nature. Our author ought to acknowledge the force of this reasoning, since he taketh pains throughout his whole *Essay on Liberty and Necessity*, to shew, that we may in many cases argue as surely and strongly from the power and influence of motives on the human mind, as from the influence of physical causes; and that there is as great a certainty, and as necessary a connexion in what are called moral causes as in physical. This author undoubtedly in that essay carrieth it too far, when, in order to subvert human liberty, he would have it thought, that in all cases the power of motives worketh with as necessary a force upon the mind, as any physical cause doth upon the effect. But that in many particular cases things may be so circumstanced with regard to moral causes, as to afford a certainty equal to what arises from physical, cannot reasonably be denied. And such is the case here put. And he expressly declareth, that “we cannot make use of a more convincing argument than to prove, that the actions ascribed to any person are contrary to the course of nature, and that no human motives in such circumstances could ever induce them to such a conduct\*.”

This writer farther requireth, that “the witnesses should be of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in any falsehood.” If the meaning be, that they must be persons distinguished by

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 135.

their rank and situation in the world, and of great reputation for knowledge, and for the eminency of their station and figure in life; this in the case here referred to would, instead of strengthening, have greatly weakened the force of their testimony. It might have been said, with some shew of plausibility, that such persons, by their knowledge and abilities, their reputation and interest; might have it in their power to countenance and propagate an imposture among the people, and give it some credit in the world. If the facts recorded in the gospel, the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ, had been patronized and attested by the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish nation, it would undoubtedly have been pretended, that they had political designs in view, and that, considering their authority and influence, they might more easily impose those things upon the multitude. On this view of things, the evidence for those important facts would have been far less convincing than now it is. And therefore the Divine wisdom hath ordered it far better, in appointing that the first witnesses of the gospel were not the worldly *wise, mighty, or noble*, but persons of mean condition, and yet of honest characters, without power, authority, or interest. And whereas this writer urgeth, that the witnesses ought to be of *such reputation as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in a falsehood*, it ought to be considered, that a man of true probity, though in a low condition, may be as unwilling to be branded as a cheat and an impostor, and as desirous to preserve his good name, which may be almost all he has to value himself upon, as persons of greater figure and eminence in the world, who may more easily find means to support themselves, and to evade detection and punishment. The apostles indeed rejoiced that they were counted *worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ*, Acts v. 41. But this was not owing to their being insensible to shame, but to the testimony of a good conscience, and to the full persuasion they had of Christ's divine mission, and the divinity of the religion they preached in his name. This particularly was the principle upon which St. Paul acted, who was a man of reputation among the Jews, and would never have made a sacrifice of this, and of all his worldly interests and expectations, to join himself to a despised persecuted party, and against whom he himself had conceived the strongest prejudices, if he had not



been brought over, by an evidence which he was not able to resist, to the acknowledgment of the Christian faith, and of the extraordinary facts on which it was established.

The last thing he insisteth upon is, that the facts attested by the witnesses should be “performed in such a public manner, “and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable.” This may be applied with the greatest propriety to the extraordinary and miraculous facts by which Christianity was attested. Justly doth St. Paul appeal to King Agrippa, in the admirable apology he made before him and the Roman Governor, Festus, and which was delivered before a numerous and august assembly of Jews and Romans, that *none of these things were hidden from him: for, saith he, this thing was not done in a corner, Acts xxvi. 26.* Christ’s whole personal ministry, and the wonderful works he wrought, were transacted not in a private and secret, but in the most open and public manner possible, in places of the greatest concourse, and before multitudes of people assembled from all parts. The same may be said of many of the miracles wrought by the apostles in the name and by the power of a risen Jesus: and particularly never was there any event of a more public nature than the extraordinary effusion of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. The first publishers of Christianity preached the religion of Jesus, and performed miracles in confirmation of it, not merely in small villages, or obscure parts of the country, but in populous cities, in those parts of the world that were most celebrated for the liberal arts, learning and politeness. They published their religion, and the wonderful facts by which it was supported, throughout the Lesser Asia, Greece, Italy; in the cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Athens, and Rome itself. If therefore their pretences had been false, they could scarce have possibly escaped a detection: especially considering that they were every-where under the eye of watchful adversaries, unbelieving Jews as well as heathens, who would not have failed to detect and expose the imposture, if there had been any. As to what the author afterward allegeth, that “in “the infancy of new religions the wise and learned commonly “esteem the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention “and regard; and when afterwards they would willingly de-

“ *te&*

“test the cheat, in order to undeceive the deluded multitude, “the season is now gone, and the records and witnesses, who “might clear up the matter, are perished beyond recovery\*;” this pretence hath no place in the case we are now considering with regard to Christianity. That religion met with the greatest opposition even in its infancy. Persons of principal authority in the nation where it first arose, bent their attention, and employed their power, to suppress it. And in all places where it was afterwards propagated, there were unbelieving Jews, who used their utmost efforts to stir up the heathens against it, who of themselves were strongly inclined by their own prejudices to oppose it: and this at the very time when, if the facts had been false, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to have detected the falsehood; which in that case must have been known to thousands: since many of the facts appealed to were of a very public nature.

Thus I have considered the conditions and qualifications he insisteth upon, as necessary to give us a *full assurance in the testimony of men* with regard to miracles; and have shown, that all the conditions that can be reasonably desired, concur, with the highest degree of evidence, in the testimony given by the apostles and first witnesses of Christianity, to the extraordinary facts whereby its divine authority was established. Their testimony had some advantages which no other testimony ever had. St. Luke observes, that *with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, Acts iv. 33. The testimony they gave was accompanied with a Divine power. The force of their testimony did not depend merely on their own veracity, but may be said to have been confirmed by the attestation of God himself. It is with the utmost propriety therefore, that the sacred writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews representeth God, as *bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will*, Heb. ii. 4. And it is incontestably true in fact, that so strong and convincing was the evidence, that great numbers both of Jews and Gentiles were brought over in that very age to the faith of a crucified and risen Saviour. Nor was this the

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 202.

effect of a too forward credulity, since it was in direct opposition to their prejudices, passions, and worldly interests. The principles and inducements which usually lead men to form wrong and partial judgments, lay wholly on the other side, and, instead of being favourable to Christianity, tended rather to determine men to disbelieve and reject it. So that it may be justly said, that the propagation of that scheme of religion which is held forth in the gospel is a thing so wonderful, taking in all the circumstances of the case, that it affordeth a manifest and most convincing proof of the truth of the extraordinary facts upon which it was founded.

I now proceed to make some observations upon the other considerations this gentleman offers in this second part of his essay; and which indeed can at best pass for no more than presumptions; and only shew, that the testimony given to miracles is not rashly to be admitted, and that great care and caution is necessary in judging of them, which will be easily allowed.

The second consideration, and upon which he seems to lay a great stress, is this: that “we may observe in human nature a principle, which, if strictly examined, will be found to diminish extremely the assurance we might have from human testimony in any kind of prodigy.” He says, “that though for the most part we readily reject any fact that is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree, yet when any thing is affirmed utterly absurd and miraculous, the mind rather more readily admits such a fact, upon account of that very circumstance, which ought to destroy all its authority. The passion of *surprise* and *wonder* arising from miracles, being an agreeable emotion, gives a sensible tendency towards the belief of those events from which it is derived——But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony in these circumstances loses all pretensions to authority\*.” And again he observes, that “should a miracle be ascribed to any new system of religion, men in all ages have been so much imposed on by the ridiculous stories of this kind, that this very circumstance will be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense,

\* Hume’s Philosophical Essays, 184, 185.

“ not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without farther examination.” And he repeats it again, that it should make us form a general resolution never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretext it may be covered\*.” He here undertaketh to answer for all *men of sense*, that they will reject all miracles produced in proof of religion without farther examination; because men in all ages have been much imposed on by ridiculous stories of this kind. But this certainly is the language, not of reason and good sense, which will dispose a man fairly to examine, but of the most obstinate prepossession and prejudice. No kinds of historical facts, whether of an ordinary or extraordinary nature, can be mentioned, in which men have not been frequently imposed upon. But this is no just reason for rejecting such facts at once without examination: and the man that would do so, instead of proving his superior good sense, would only render himself ridiculous. That there have been many false miracles will be readily acknowledged; but this doth not prove that there never have been any true ones. It ought indeed to make us very cautious, and to examine miracles carefully before we receive them; but it is no reason at all, or a very absurd one, for rejecting them all at once without examination and inquiry. Thus to reject them can only be justified upon this principle, that it is not possible there should be a true miracle wrought in favour of any system of religion. But by what medium will he undertake to prove this? He seems expressly to admit, that in other cases, “ there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony\*.” This concession is not very consistent with what he had laboured in the first part of his essay to shew, with regard to all miracles in general, *viz.* that they are incapable of being proved by any testimony. But now, provided miracles be not produced in proof of religion, he seems willing to allow, that they may *possibly admit of proof from human testimony*. The only case therefore in which they are never to be believed, is when they are pretended to be wrought in favour of religion. But in this he seems to have both the reason of the thing, and the general sense

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 204, 205.

Ibid. p. 203.

of mankind, against him. It is certainly more reasonable to believe a miracle, when a valuable end can be assigned for it, than to believe it when we cannot discern any important end to be answered by it at all. And one of the most valuable ends for which a miracle can be supposed to be wrought seems to be this, to give an attestation to the divine mission of persons sent to instruct mankind in religious truths of great importance, and to lead them in the way of salvation. Our author seems sometimes to lay a mighty stress on the general opinion and common *sentiments* of mankind\*." And there are few notions, which, by his own acknowledgment, have more generally obtained in all nations and ages, than this, that there have been miracles actually wrought on some occasions, especially in matters of religion, and that they are to be regarded as proofs of a divine interposition. This is a principle which seems to be conformable to the natural sense of the human mind.

The observation he makes concerning the *agreeable emotion* produced by the *passion of wonder and surprize*, and the strong propensity *there is in mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous*, proves nothing against this principle. The passion of wonder and surprize was certainly not given us in vain, but for very wise purposes; and it may be presumed, that this passion, as well as others, may be rightly exercised upon proper objects. But I cannot agree with this gentleman, that men are naturally disposed and inclined to believe a thing the rather for its being *utterly absurd and miraculous*, especially in matters of religion. They may indeed, and often do, believe absurdities; but they never believe a thing merely because it is absurd, but because, taking all considerations together, they do not look upon it to be absurd. It may be observed by the way, that this writer here makes *absurd* and *miraculous* to be terms of the same signification, whereas they are very different ideas. A miracle, when supposed to be wrought by a power adequate to the effect, and for excellent ends, is indeed wonderful, but has no absurdity in it at all. It is true, there have often been very absurd things recommended to popular belief under the notion of miracles; and such pretended miracles have been received without much examina-

\* Hume's Essays, moral and political, p. 307.

tion, when wrought in favour of the established superstition. But even real miracles are received with difficulty, when they are wrought in opposition to it; and where the influence of the priesthood, the prejudices of the vulgar, and the authority of the magistrate, are on the one side; which was the case of Christianity at its first appearance. Considering the nature of that religion, how contrary it was to the prevailing notions and prejudices both of Jews and Gentiles, the strictness of the morals it prescribed, the scheme of salvation through a crucified Saviour which it proposed, the meanness of the instruments by which it was propagated, and the numberless difficulties it had to encounter with; the miracles wrought in attestation of it could not have met with a favourable reception in the world, if there had not been the most convincing evidence of their being really wrought. The strangeness of the facts, instead of producing belief, would rather have turned to its disadvantage, and could scarce have failed being detected in such circumstances, if they had been false.

His third observation is, that it “forms a very strong presumption against all supernatural relations, that they are always found chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people have ever given admission to any of them, they have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors\*.” But no presumption can be drawn from this to the prejudice of Christianity, which did not make its appearance in an ignorant and barbarous age, but at a time when the world was greatly civilized, and in nations where arts and learning had made a very great progress. And it must be considered, that it had not only their inveterate prejudices, their darling passions, and inclinations, but their pretended miracles to encounter with; extraordinary facts received from their ancestors, who *transmitted them*, as he expresseth it, *with that inviolable sanction and authority, which always attends ancient and received opinions.* How strong and cogent therefore must the force of the evidence in behalf of the Christian religion, and the extraordinary miraculous facts designed to support it, have been, which, in the hands of such mean instruments, could make so great a progress in a

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 185, 187.

civilized and enlightened age, and prove too hard for the religion of the empire; which, besides its being interwoven with the civil establishment, had the prescription of many ages to plead, and was supported by pretended miracles, prodigies, and oracles! Mr. Hume is pleased to take notice on this occasion of the management of that cunning impostor, Alexander\*. But though, the better to carry on the cheat, he had laid the scene among the barbarous Paphlagonians, who were reckoned among the most stupid and ignorant of the human race; and not only put in practice all the arts of imposture (though it doth not appear, that he pretended to work miracles among the people, or put the proof of his authority upon them), but had procured a powerful interest among the great to support him, he and his impostures soon sunk into oblivion, and so undoubtedly would Christianity too have done, if its extraordinary facts had no better foundation in truth and fact than his pretensions had.

“ I may add,” saith he, “ as a fourth reason which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any, even those which have not been expressly detected, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of the testimony, but even the testimony destroys itself.” He goes on to observe, that “ in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary: that it is impossible that all these different religions should be established on a solid foundation: that every miracle pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions, as it is designed to establish that particular system, has the same force to overthrow every other system; and consequently to destroy the credit of those miracles on which that system was established. So that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of those prodigies as opposite to one another †.” This writer is here pleased to confound *prodigies* and *miracles*, which ought to be distinguished. Many things that have passed under the notion of prodigies, are very far from being miracles, in the strict and proper sense in which we are now considering them: and if we speak of

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 188, 189.

† Ibid. p. 190, 191.  
miracles

miracles properly so called, the supposition he here goes upon, *viz.* that all religions have been founded upon miracles, and have put the proof of their authority upon them, is manifestly false. It is well known, that Mahomet did not pretend to establish his religion by miracles; nor indeed can it be proved, that any systems of religion had any tolerable pretension of being originally founded upon miracles, but the Jewish and the Christian; and these, though in some respects *differant*, are not *contrary*, but mutually support each other; the former being introductive and preparatory to the latter. But if his supposition should be admitted, that all religions in the world have been founded upon the credit of miracles, it is hard to comprehend the force of his reasoning. By what logic doth it follow, that because miracles have been believed by mankind in all ages and nations to have been wrought in proof of religion, therefore miracles were never really wrought at all in proof of religion, nor are they ever to be believed in any single instance? With the same force it may be argued, that because there have been and are many opposite schemes of religion in the world, therefore their being opposite to one another proves that they are all false, and that there is no such thing as true religion in the world at all. But let us suppose ever so great a number of falsehoods opposed to truth, that opposition of falsehood to truth doth not make truth to be less true, or destroy the certainty and evidence of it. Supposing the religions to be opposite, and that miracles are said to be wrought in attestation of those opposite religions, it may indeed be fairly concluded that they cannot be all true, but not that none of them is so. Our author himself seems to be apprehensive, that this might be looked upon as a fallacious way of reasoning. "This argument," says he, "may appear very subtle and refined; but is not in reality different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes, that the credit of two witnesses, maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed\*." This gentleman has here given us a most extraordinary specimen how well qualified he would be to determine causes if

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 192.



he sat in a court of judicature. If there came several witnesses before him, and their testimony was opposite to one another, he would without farther examination reject them all at once, and make their opposition to one another to be alone a proof that they were all false, and none of them to be depended upon. But it hath been hitherto thought reasonable, when testimonies are opposite, to weigh and compare those testimonies, in order to form a proper judgment concerning them. In case of *alibi's*, which is the case the author here puts, the testimonies do not always destroy one another. A just and impartial judge will not immediately reject the testimonies on both sides without examination, because they contradict one another, which is the method our author seems here to recommend as reasonable, but will carefully compare them, that he may find out on which side the truth lies, and which of the testimonies is most to be credited, and will give his judgment accordingly. This certainly is the course which right reason prescribeth in all cases, where there is an opposition of testimony, and which it is to be presumed this gentleman himself would recommend in every case, but where the cause of religion is concerned. For here, notwithstanding all his pretensions to freedom of thinking, his prejudices are so strong, that he is for proceeding by different weights and measures from what he and all mankind would judge reasonable in every other instance. He hath shewed himself so little qualified to judge impartially in matters of this nature, that I believe *men of sense*, to use his own phrase, will lay very little stress on any judgment he shall think fit to pronounce in this cause.

The only part of Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles* which now remaineth to be considered, is that which relates to some particular accounts of miraculous facts, which he would have us believe are as well or better attested, than those recorded in the Gospels, and yet are to be rejected as false and incredible. The first instance he mentioneth is that of the Emperor Vespasian's curing a blind and a lame man at Alexandria, and which he affirms is one of the best attested miracles in all profane history. This has been urged by almost every deistical writer who hath treated of miracles: and how little it is to the purpose in the present controversy hath been often shewn. Not to repeat what Mr. Adams hath well urged concerning it, it may be sufficient to observe, that

that it appeareth from the accounts given us by the historians who mention it \*, that the design of these miracles was to give weight to the authority of Vespasian, newly made Emperor by the great men and the army, and to make it be believed that his elevation to the imperial throne was approved by the gods. I believe every reasonable man will be of opinion, that in any case of this kind there is great ground to suspect artifice and management. And who would be so presumptuous as to make too narrow a scrutiny into the truth of miracles, in which the interests of the great, and the authority of a mighty Emperor, were so nearly concerned? And if, as this writer observes from Tacitus, some who were present continued to relate these facts, even after Vespasian and his family were no longer in possession of the empire; it doth not appear, that the persons referred to were such as had been in the secret of the management, which probably lay in few hands; or if they were, it is not to be wondered at that they should afterwards be unwilling to own the part they had in this affair; especially since no methods were made use of to oblige them to discover the fraud.

The next instance he produceth is the miracle pretended to have been wrought at Saragossa, and mentioned by Cardinal De Retz, who, by Mr. Hume's own account, did not believe it. But certainly a man must have his head very oddly turned, to attempt to draw a parallel between the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles, and miracles pretended to have been wrought in a country where the inquisition is established, where the influence and interests of the priests, the superstitions and prejudices of the people, and the authority of the civil magistrate, are all combined to support the credit of those miracles, and where it would be extremely dangerous to make a strict inquiry into the truth of them; and even the expressing the least doubt concerning them might expose a man to the most terrible of all evils and sufferings.

But that which Mr. Hume seems to lay the greatest stress upon, and on which he enlarges for some pages together, is, the miracles reported to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris. Having observed, that in the *Recueil des Miracles de*

\* Tacit. Hist. lib. 4. versus finem. — Sueton. in Vespas. cap. 8.

*l'Abbé*

*l'Abbé de Paris*, there is a parallel run between the miracles of our Saviour and those of the Abbé, he pronounces, that “ if the “ inspired writers were to be considered merely as human testi- “ mony, the French author is very moderate in his comparison, “ since he might with some appearance of reason pretend, that “ the Jansenist miracles much surpass the others in credit and “ authority\*.”

This has been of late a favourite topic with the deists. Great triumphs have been raised upon it, as if it were alone sufficient to destroy the credit of the miraculous facts recorded in the New Testament. I shall therefore make some observations upon it, though in doing so I shall be obliged to take notice of several things which Mr. Adams hath already observed, in his judicious reflections upon this subject, in his answer to Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, from page 65 to page 78.

The account Mr. Hume pretends to give of this whole affair is very unfair and disingenuous, and is absolutely unworthy of any man that makes pretensions to a free and impartial inquiry. He positively asserts, that the miraculous facts were so strongly proved, that the Molinists or Jesuits were never able distinctly to refute or detect them; and that they could not deny the truth of the facts, but ascribed them to witchcraft and the devil. Yet certain it is, that the Jesuits or Molinists did deny many of the facts to be true as the Jansenists related them; that they asserted them to be false, and plainly proved several of them to be so. Particularly the Archbishop of Sens distinctly insisted upon twenty-two of those pretended miraculous facts, all which he charged as owing to falsehood and imposture.

He farther observes, that twenty-two of the Curé or Rectors of Paris pressed the Archbishop of Paris to examine those miracles, and asserted them to be known to the whole world. But he knew, or might have known, that some of those very miracles which those gentlemen desired might be particularly inquired into, and which they represented as undeniably true and certain, were afterwards examined, and the perjury of the principal witnesses plainly detected †. And the Archbishop, who, he tells

\* Hume's Philosophical Essays, p. 196.

† See Mr. des Voeux's Critique Generale, p. 242, 243.

us, wisely forbore an inquiry, caused a public judicial inquest to be made, as Mr. Adams observes, and in an ordonnance of November 8, 1735, published the most convincing proofs, that the miracles so strongly vouched by the Curés, were forged and counterfeited\*.

Mr. Hume is pleased to observe, that "the Molinist party tried to discredit those miracles in one instance, that of Made-moiselle le Franc, but were not able to do it:" where he speaks, as if this were the single instance in which they tried to discredit those miracles, which is far from being true. This indeed was taken particular notice of, because it was the first history of a miraculous fact which the Jansenists thought fit to publish, with a pompous dissertation prefixed. It was cried up as of such unquestionable truth, that it could not be denied without doubting of the most certain facts: and yet the story was proved to be false in the most material circumstances, by forty witnesses judicially examined upon oath. It was plainly proved, that she was considerably better of her maladies before she went to the tomb at all: that she was no stronger when she returned from the tomb than she was when she went to it: and that she still stood in need of remedies afterwards. Mr. Hume indeed takes upon him to declare, that the proceedings were the most irregular in the world, particularly in citing but a few of the Jansenist witnesses, whom they tampered with: and then he adds, "besides they were soon overwhelmed with a cloud of new witnesses, an hundred and twenty in number, who gave oath for the miracles." He doth not say, they all gave oath for this particular miracle, but for the miracles: and indeed most of those testimonies were very little to the purpose, and seemed to be designed rather for parade and show than for proof; and nothing turned more to the disadvantage of the Jansenists, and their endeavouring still to maintain the credit of this miracle, after the falsehood of it had been so evidently detected: the more witnesses they endeavoured to produce for this, the more they rendered themselves suspected in all the rest. They alleged some want of formality in the proceedings, but were never able to disprove the principal circumstances of the facts alleged on the

\* Adams's Essay, p. 71.

other side, and which were absolutely inconsistent with the truth and reality of the miracle\*.

Mr. Hume refers his reader to the *Recueil des Miracles de l'Abbé Paris*, in three volumes: but especially to the famous book of Mr. de Montgeron, a counsellor or judge of the parliament of Paris, and which was dedicated to the French King. But if he had read on both sides, or had thought fit to lay the matter fairly before his reader, he might have informed him, that these books have been solidly answered by Mr. Des Voeux, a very ingenious and judicious author, who had himself been bred up among the Jansenists, and was at Paris part of the time that this scene was carrying on. See his *Lettres sur les Miracles*, published in 1735, and his *Critique Générale du Livre de Mr. de Montgeron*, in 1741. See also what relates to this subject in the 19th and 20th tomes of the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*.

There never was perhaps a book written with a greater air of assurance and confidence, than that of Mr. de Montgeron. He intitles it, *The Truth of the Miracles wrought by the Intercession of M. de Paris and other Appellants, demonstrated against M. the Archbishop of Sens*. It was natural therefore to expect, that he would have attempted to justify all those miracles which that prelate had attacked. But of twenty-two which are distinctly insisted upon by the Archbishop, there are seventeen which Mr. de Montgeron does not meddle with. He hath passed by those of them against which the strongest charges of falsehood and imposture lay. Five of the miracles attacked by the Archbishop, he takes pains to justify; to which he has added four more, which that prelate had not distinctly considered. Mr. Des Voeux, who has examined this work of Mr. de Montgeron with great care and judgment, hath plainly shown, that there are every-where to be discovered in it marks of the strongest prepossession†. Carried away by the power of his prejudices, and by his affection to the Jansenist cause, to which he was greatly attached, he has in several instances disguised and misrepresented facts in a man-

\* This whole matter is set in a clear light in Mr. Des Voeux's *Dissertation sur les Miracles*, &c. p. 46. 49. and in his *Critique Generale*, p. 204. 231, 232.

† The character of Mr. de Montgeron is well represented by Mr. Adams, in his *Answer to Hume*, p. 74; 75.

ner which cannot be excused or vindicated. The last-mentioned author has charged him with faults, not merely of inadvertency, but with direct falsifications designed to impose upon the public. See the sixth letter of his *Critique Générale*, page 208, *et seq.* Mr. Hume has taken care not to give his reader the least hint of any thing of this nature.

The remarks which have been now made may help us to judge of Mr. Hume's conduct in his management of this subject.

I shall now proceed to make some observations upon the remarkable differences there are between the miracles recorded in the gospels, and those ascribed to the Abbé de Paris; by considering which it will appear, that no argument can be justly drawn from the latter to discredit the former, or to invalidate the proofs produced for them.

I. One observation of no small weight is this: at the time when the miracles of the Abbé de Paris first appeared, there was a strong and numerous party in France, and which was under the conduct of very able and learned men, who were strongly prepossessed in favour of that cause which those miracles seemed to be intended to support: and it might naturally be expected, that these would use all their interest and influence for maintaining and spreading the credit of them among the people. And so it actually happened. The first rumours of these miracles were eagerly laid hold on; and they were cried up as real and certain miracles, and as giving a clear decision of Heaven on the side of the appellants, even before there was any regular proof so much as pretended to be given for them\*. To which it may be added, that the beginning of this whole affair was at a very promising conjuncture, *viz.* when the Cardinal de Nozilles was archbishop of Paris; who, whatever may be said of his capacity and integrity, which Mr. Hume highly extols, was well known to be greatly inclined to favour the cause of the appellants. It was therefore a situation of things very favourable to the credit of those miracles, that they first appeared under his administration, and were tried before his officials; and though the succeeding archbishop was no friend to the Janfenists, yet when once the credit of those miracles was in some measure established, and

\* See *Critique Generale*, lct. vi.

they had got the popular vogue on their side, the affair was more easily carried on. But at the first appearance of Christianity, the circumstances of things were entirely different. There were indeed parties among the Jews, the most powerful of which were the Pharisees and Sadducees, besides the priests and rulers of the Jews, and the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation: but not one of these afforded the least countenance to the first witnesses and publishers of the Christian religion. Our Lord, far from addicting himself to any party, freely declared against what was amiss in every one of them: he opposed the distinguishing tenets of the Sadducees; the traditions, superstitions, and hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and the prejudices of the vulgar. Christianity proceeded upon a principle directly contrary to that, in which all parties among the Jews were agreed, *viz.* upon the doctrine of a spiritual kingdom, and a suffering Messiah: and accordingly all the different sects and parties, all the powers civil and ecclesiastical, united their interests and endeavours to oppose and suppress it. Whatever suspicion therefore might be entertained with regard to the miracles said to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, which had a strong party from the beginning prepared to receive and support them, no such suspicion can reasonably be admitted as to the truth and reality of the extraordinary facts whereby Christianity was attested, which, as the case was circumstanced, could scarce possibly have made their way in the manner they did, or have escaped detection, if they had not been true.

II. Another consideration, which shews a remarkable difference between the miracles recorded to have been wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, and those ascribed to the Abbé de Paris, is this: That the former carry plain characters of a divine interposition, and a supernatural power; and the latter, even taking their own account of them, do not appear to be evidently miraculous, as they may be accounted for without supposing any thing properly supernatural in the case. Our Lord Jesus Christ not only healed all manner of diseases, but he raised the dead: he commanded the winds and the seas, and they obeyed him: he searched the hearts, and knew the thoughts of men: he gave many express and circumstantial predictions of future contingencies, both relating to his own sufferings and death, and to his consequent resurrection

resurrection and exaltation, and relating to the calamities that should come upon the Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and the wonderful propagation and establishment of his church and kingdom in the world, which it was impossible for any man, judging by the rules of human probability, to foresee: he not only performed the most wonderful works himself, but he imparted the same miraculous power to his disciples, and poured forth upon them the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, as he had promised and foretold; gifts of the most admirable nature, which were never paralleled before or since, and which were peculiarly fitted for spreading and propagating the Christian religion. With regard to these, and other things which might be mentioned, no man has ever pretended to draw a comparison between the miracles ascribed to the Abbé de Paris and those of our Saviour: and accordingly one of the most zealous and able advocates for the former, M. Le Gros, expressly acknowledgeth, that there is *an infinite difference between them*, and declares, that he *will never forget that difference*. The only instance in which a parallel is pretended to be drawn, is with regard to miraculous cures, which, alone considered, are the most uncertain and equivocal of all miracles. Diseases have often been surprisngly cured, without any thing that can be properly called miraculous in the case. Wonderful has been the effect of medicines administered in certain circumstances: and some maladies, after having long resisted all the art and power of remedies, have gone off of themselves by the force of nature, or by some surprisng and unexpected turn, in a manner that cannot be distinctly explained. Yet it may be observed, that there were several circumstances attending the miraculous cures wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, which plainly shewed them to be divine. The cures were wrought in an instant, by a commanding word. The blind, the lame, those that laboured under the most obstinate and inveterate diseases, found themselves immediately restored at once with an Almighty facility. If there had been only a few instances of this kind, it might possibly have been attributed to some odd accident, or hidden cause, which could not be accounted for: but the instances of such complete and instantaneous cures wrought by our Saviour were very numerous. They extended to all manner of diseases, and to all persons without ex-



ception who applied to him: yea, he cured some that did not apply to him, who did not know him, or who were his enemies, and had no expectation of a cure, in which cases it could not be pretended that imagination had any share. In all these respects, there was a remarkable difference between the miraculous cures wrought by our Saviour, and those pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris. Several of their most boasted cures, and which were pretended to have been sudden and perfected at once, appear from their own accounts to have been carried on by slow degrees, and therefore might have been brought about in a natural way. Some of these cures were days, weeks, and even months, before they were perfected. One nine days devotion followed another, and they were suffered to languish, and continue praying and supplicating for a considerable time together; and if the cure happened, and the distemper came to a crisis during the course of their long attendance, and whilst they were continuing their devotions, this passed for a miraculous cure, though it might well be done without any miracle at all: especially as several of those persons continued to be taking remedies, even whilst they were attending at the tomb. It is manifest from the relations published by themselves, that with regard to several of those who were pretended to be miraculously cured, their maladies had already begun to abate, and they had found considerable ease and relief in a natural way before they came to the tomb at all: and some of them seem by the force of their imagination to have believed themselves cured, when they were not so, or to have taken a temporary relief for an absolute cure. Several of the cures, the accounts of which were published with great pomp, could not with any propriety be said to have been perfected at all; since the persons said to have been cured still continued infirm, and had returns of their former disorders. This can scarce be supposed, if the cures had been really miraculous, and owing to an extraordinary exertion of the power of God, who would not have left his own work imperfect. See all these things fully proved by many instances, in M. des Voeux's *Lettres sur les Miracles*; particularly in the fifth of these letters.

To all which it may be added, that of the vast numbers who came to the tomb to be cured, and who had recourse to the Abbé's intercession, there were but few on whom the cures were wrought,

wrought, in comparison of those who found no benefit at all, though they applied to him with the utmost devotion, and continued to do so for a long time together: and indeed, considering how many there were that applied for help and cure, and how much they were prepossessed with the notions countenanced in the Romish church, of the power of departed saints, of the prevalency of their intercession, and the efficacy of their relics, and to what a height their imagination was raised by their prejudices in favour of the appellants, by the high opinion they had of the Abbé's extraordinary sanctity, by the rumours of miracles daily spread and propagated, and by the vast crowds which attended at the tomb, it would have been really a wonder, if, amongst the multitudes that came for cure, there had not been several who found themselves greatly relieved. The advocates for the miracles mightily extol the extraordinary faith and confidence the sick persons had in the intercession of the blessed Deacon, as they call him: and the force of their imagination, when carried to so extraordinary a pitch, might in some particular cases produce great effects. Many wonderful instances to this purpose have been observed and recorded by the ablest physicians, by which it appears what a mighty influence imagination, accompanied with strong passions, hath often had upon human bodies, especially in the cure of diseases: it hath often done more in a short time this way, than a long course of medicines have been able to accomplish. It is not therefore to be much wondered at, that as the case was circumstanced, amidst such a multitude of persons, some surprising cures were wrought: but it could not be expected that the effect would be constant and uniform. If it answered in some instances, it would fail in many more: and accordingly so it was with regard to these pretended miraculous cures. And if this had been the case in the extraordinary cures wrought by our Saviour, there would have been ground of suspicion, that what some have alleged might possibly have been true, that his miracles owed their force, not to any supernatural energy, but to the power of imagination. But taking these miracles as they are recorded in the gospels, it is manifest, that there can be no just ground for such a pretence. They exhibit evident proofs of a divine interposition, which cannot be said of those reported to have been wrought at the Abbé's tomb. M. de Mongeron,

in his book dedicated to the King, published an account of eight or nine cures; and it is to be supposed, that he fixed upon those which he thought had the appearance of being most signally miraculous: and yet the very first of those miracles, *viz.* that affirmed to have been wrought upon Don Alphonso de Palacio, appeareth plainly, by taking the whole of the relation as M. Montgeron himself hath given it, to have had nothing in it properly miraculous, as Mr. Adams hath clearly shewn\*. And with regard both to that and the other miracles so pompously displayed by M. de Montgeron, M. Des Voeux has very ingeniously and judiciously, after a distinct examination of each of them, made it appear, that they might have been wrought without supposing any miraculous or supernatural interposition at all. See the last letter of his *Critique Générale*.

III. Another ~~consideration~~ <sup>consideration</sup>, which shews the great difference there is between the miracles wrought at the first establishment of Christianity, and those said to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, and that no argument can reasonably be brought from the latter to the prejudice of the former, is taken from the many suspicious circumstances attending the latter, from which the former were entirely free. Christ's miracles were wrought, in a grave and decent, in a great but simple manner, becoming one sent of God, without any absurd or ridiculous ceremonies, or superstitious observances. But the miracles of the Abbé de Paris were attended with circumstances that had all the marks of superstition, and which seemed designed and fitted to strike the imagination. The earth of his tomb was often made use of, or the waters of the well of his house. The nine days devotion was constantly used, and frequently repeated again and again by the same persons; a ceremony derived originally from the pagans, and which hath been condemned as superstitious by some eminent divines of the Romish church†. Another circumstance to be observed, with relation to Christ's miracles, is, that, as hath been already hinted, they were not only perfected at once, but the persons found themselves healed and restored without trouble or difficulty. But in the case of the

\* Adams's Essay, in Answer to Hume, p. 76, 77.

† Lettres sur les Miracles, p. 258, 259, 336, 337.

cures affirmed to have been wrought at the Abbé's tomb, it appeareth from their own accounts, not only that they were gradual and slow, but that the persons on whom these cures were wrought, frequently suffered the most grievous and excessive pains and torments, and which they themselves represent to have been greater than ever they had felt before, or were able to express; and these pains often continued for several days together in the utmost extremity\*. To which may be added, the violent agitations and convulsions, which became so usual on these occasions, that they came at length to be regarded as symptoms of the miraculous cures; though they could not be properly regarded in this view, since many of those who had those convulsions found no relief in their maladies, and even grew worse than before. They were frequently attended with strange contortions, sometimes frightful, sometimes ridiculous; and sometimes inconsistent with the rules of modesty and decency †. And accordingly they have been condemned by some of the most eminent Janse-nist divines. In 1735 there was published at Paris a remarkable piece, intitled, *Consultation sur les Convulsions*, signed by thirty appellant doctors, men of great reputation among the Janse-nists for learning, judgment, and probity; the greater part of whom had at first entertained favourable thoughts of those convulsions; and some of them had publicly declared them to be the work of God. But now they pronounced them to be unworthy of God, of his infinite majesty, wisdom, and goodness: They declared that it was a folly, a fanaticism, a scandal, and in one word, a blasphemy against God, to attribute to him these

\* Lettres sur les Miracles, p. 339, & seq.

† Some of those that were seized with these convulsions, or pretended to be so, were guilty of the most extravagant follies. They pretended to prophecy, and uttered several predictions, which the event soon proved to be false. One of them went so far as to foretel, that the church-yard of St. Medard, which had been shut up by the King's order, should be opened, and that M. de Paris should appear in the church, in the presence of great numbers of people, on the first of May following. See this and other remarkable things relating to these convulsions, in M. Vernet's *Traite de la Verite de la Religion Chretienne*, sect. 7. chap. 22, 23. And there cannot be a greater proof of the power of M. de Montgeron's prejudices, than that in the last edition of his book, in three volumes 4to. he has particularly applied himself to support and justify these convulsions.

operations; and did not scruple to intimate, that they rendered the miraculous cures, to which they were pretended to be annexed, suspected. These doctors, who were called the *Consultants*, condemned all the convulsions in general. Others of the Jansenist divines, whom M. de Montgeron has distinguished by the title of the *Antifecouristes*, and whom he acknowledges to be among the most zealous appellants, and to be persons of great merit and eminence, though they did not condemn all the convulsions, yet passed a very severe censure upon those of them which that gentleman looks upon to be the most extraordinary and miraculous of all. And with regard to these convulsions in general, it may be observed, that, by the acknowledgment of the most skilful physicians, nervous affections have frequently produced strange symptoms; that they are often of a catching contagious nature, and easily communicated; and that they may be counterfeited by art. Many of those that were seized by M. Heraut, the Lieutenant of Police, acknowledged to him that they had counterfeited convulsions: in consequence of which there was an ordonnance published by the King, January 27, 1732, for searching out and apprehending those impostors. And yet Mr. Hume has thought proper to represent it, as if M. Heraut, though he had full power to seize and examine the *witnesses* and *subjects* of these miracles, *could never reach any thing satisfactory against them.*

These must be owned to be circumstances, which administer just grounds of suspicion, and which make a wide difference between the miracles pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, and those that were performed by our Saviour, and by the apostles in his name.

IV. The next observation I shall make is this: that several of the miracles ascribed to the Abbé, and which were pretended to be proved by many witnesses, were afterwards clearly convicted of falsehood and imposture; which brings a great discredit upon all the rest: whereas nothing of this kind can be alleged against the miracles by which Christianity was attested. The affair of Anne le Franc, of which some account was given above, shews, as M. Des Voeux justly observes, how little dependence is to be had upon informations in this cause directed by Jansenists. But this is not the only instance of this kind. They had published, that

that La Dalmaix had been miraculously cured by the Abbe's intercession; and this was proved by a letter pretended to have been written by herself. And yet this pretended miraculous cure was afterwards denied by the person herself, by her mother, and all her sisters: and by a sentence of a court of judicature of May 17, 1737, a person was declared to be convicted of having forged that, and some other letters, under the name of Dalmaix\*. The Sieur le Doux openly retracted the relation of a miracle said to have been wrought upon himself. M. Des Voeux gives several other instances of false miracles, published by the Jansenists, and afterwards acknowledged to be so †. Jean Nivet was represented, by decisive informations, as cured of his deafness, and yet it is certain that he was deaf after, as well as before. The record of the informations made by Mr. Thomassin is full of contradictions, which discover the falsehood and perjury of the principal actors, and of the only witness of the miracle, as the Archbishop of Sens has well proved: though many of these proofs are passed over in silence by M. le Gros, who undertook to answer him ‡. Some of the witnesses and persons concerned withdrew, to escape the search that was made for them, and to shun the examination and inquiry which the king had ordered; and others, who had attested that they were cured by the intercession of the Abbé de Paris, afterwards retracted it. The certificates themselves, on which so great a stress is laid, tend in many instances to increase the suspicion against those facts, which they were designed to confirm. The very number of those certificates, many of which are nothing at all to the purpose, and serve only for shew, are plain proofs of art and design. The manner of drawing up those certificates, and the relations of the miracles, and the style and form of expression, shew, that the persons in whose names they are drawn had the assistance of persons of a capacity much superior to their own. Long pieces, in a correct style, and in perfect good order, were published under the name of mean and illiterate persons. M. le Gros owns, that the relation of Genevieve Colin was reformed

\* Vernet ubi supra, cap. xxi.

† Lettres sur les Miracles, p. 171, et seq. Critique Generale, p. 204, &c. 233, 234.

‡ Lettres sur les Miracles, p. 242, 243.

as to the style, by a person whom she desired to do it. Thus they had it in their power, under pretence of reforming, to alter it, and got the simple person to sign the whole. Five witnesses in the case of Anne le Franc deposed, that their certificates left with the notary were altered, falsified, and embellished with divers circumstances. Many of the relations which were at first published, and were not thought full enough, were afterwards suppressed, and do not appear in M. de Montgeron's collection; and others more ample were substituted in their stead, and embellished with many striking circumstances, which were omitted in the first relation. Many of the witnesses in their depositions carry it farther than, according to their own account, they could have any certain knowledge. Some of them appear to have been surprized into their testimonies by false or imperfect representations; and artifices were employed to procure certificates from physicians, without bringing the case fully before them, or suffering them fairly to examine it.

To all which it may be added, that there is great reason to suspect, that many poor people feigned maladies, and pretended to be cured, on purpose to procure the gifts and benefactions of others; which many of them did to good advantage. It is well known, and has been often proved, that in the Romish church there have been instances of persons, who made a trade of feigning maladies, and pretending to be miraculously cured. Such a one was Catharine de Prés, who was afterwards convicted by her own confession; of which Father Le Brun hath given a particular account, *Hist. Crit. des Prat. Superstit.* liv. ii. cap. 4. who hath also detected several other false miracles which had been believed by numbers of that church. And may we not reasonably suspect the same of many poor people who came to the tomb of the Abbé de Paris? See all these things shewn in M. Des Voeux's *Lettres sur les Miracles*, Letter V, VI. and especially in Letters VII. and VIII. of his *Critique Générale*, where he particularly examineth every one of the miracles produced by M. de Montgeron. It is his observation, that the more carefully we consider those relations, and compare them with the pieces that are designed to justify them, the more plainly the falsehood of them appeareth. And accordingly he hath found out not merely a single contradiction, but numerous contradictions,

in the relations of the several miracles, compared with the certificates, and the pieces produced in justification of them. And therefore he asks with good reason, what becomes of demonstrations built on such relations and such certificates? He very properly observes, that the falsity even of a small number of facts, which are pretended to be proved by certificates, that were collected by those who took pains to verify the miracles, are sufficient to discredit all others founded on such certificates.

If the same things could have been justly objected against the miracles recorded in the New Testament, Christianity, considering the other disadvantages it laboured under, could never have been established. But the case with regard to these miracles was very different. They were not indeed proved by certificates, which may be procured by art and management. The first publishers of the Christian religion did not go about to collect evidences and testimonies; nor was there any need of their doing so in facts that were publicly known, and the reality of which their enemies themselves were not able to deny. They acted with greater simplicity, and with an open confidence of truth. Their narrations are plain and artless; nor do they take pains to prepossess or influence the reader, either by artful insinuations, or too *violent assertions*; which our author mentions as a suspicious circumstance. Never were any of their enemies able to convict them of falsehood. Far from ever denying the facts they had witnessed, or withdrawing for fear of having those facts inquired into, as several did in the other case, they openly avowed those facts before the public tribunals, and before persons of the highest authority: they never varied in their testimony, but persisted in it with an unfainting constancy, and sealed it with their blood. And it gives no small weight to their testimony, that they witnessed for facts, which were designed to confirm a scheme of religion contrary to their own most rooted prejudices. Nor can it be alleged, that they were themselves divided about the reality and divinity of the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles, much less that they rejected and condemned many of them as foolish, scandalous, and injurious to the Divine Majesty; which was the censure passed upon some of the extraordinary facts relating to the Abbé de Paris, by the most eminent Jansenist divines.

Finally,



Finally, the last observation I shall make is this: that the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles appear to have been wrought for an end worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness. The declared design of them was to give an attestation to the divine mission of the most excellent person that ever appeared in the world, and to confirm the best scheme of religion that was ever published, the most manifestly conducive to the glory of God, and to the salvation of mankind. Here was an end worthy of God, and for which it was fit for him to interpose in the most extraordinary manner. Accordingly this religion, thus attested and confirmed, was established in the world, and soon triumphed over all opposition. All the power of the adversary, civil or sacerdotal, could not put a stop to its progress, or to the wonderful works done in confirmation of it. The effects which followed, considering the amazing difficulties it had to struggle with, and the seeming weakness and meanness of the instruments made use of to propagate it, proved the reality of those miracles, and that the whole was carried on by a divine power. But if we turn our views on the other hand to the miracles pretended to have been wrought at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris, it doth not appear that they answered any valuable end. There has indeed been an end found out for them, *viz.* to give a testimony from heaven to the cause of the appellants. But we may justly conclude from the wisdom of God, that in that case it would have been so ordered, as to make it evident that this was the intention of them, and that he would have taken care that no opposition from men should prevail, to defeat the design for which he interposed in so extraordinary a manner. But this was far from being the case. Mr. Hume indeed tells us, that “no Jansenist was ever at a loss to account for the cessation of the miracles, when the church-yard was shut up by the king’s edict. ’Twas the touch of the tomb which operated those extraordinary effects, and when no one could approach the tomb, no effect could be expected\*.” But supposing that the design of those extraordinary divine interpositions was to give a testimony from heaven to the cause of the appellants, it is absurd to imagine, that it would have been in the power of an earthly prince, by

\* Hume’s Philosophical Essays, p. 208.

shutting up the tomb, to put a stop to the course of the miraculous operations, and to render the design of God of none effect\*. It strengthens this, when it is farther considered, that the whole affair of these pretended miracles turned in the issue rather to the disadvantage of the cause it was designed to confirm. It hath been already observed, that some of the most eminent among the appellants doctors, and who were most zealously attached to that cause, were greatly scandalized at several of those miracles, and especially at the extraordinary convulsions which generally attended them. The censures they passed upon them gave occasion to bitter contentions, and mutual severe reproaches and accusations. Some of the Jansenist writers themselves complain, that whereas before there was an entire and perfect union and harmony among them, as if they had been all of one heart and soul, there have been since that time cruel divisions and animosities, so that those who were friends before became irreconcilable enemies†. And can it be imagined, that God would execute his designs in so imperfect a manner? that he would exert his own divine power to give testimony to that cause, and yet do it in such a way as to weaken that cause instead of supporting it, to raise prejudices against it in the minds of enemies, instead of gaining them, and to divide and offend the friends of it, instead of confirming and uniting them? Upon the whole, with regard to the attestations given to Christianity, all was wise, consistent, worthy of God, and suited to the end for which it was designed. But the other is a broken, incoherent scheme, which cannot be reconciled to itself, nor made to consist with the wisdom and harmony of the divine proceedings. The former therefore is highly credible, though the latter is not so.

The several considerations which have been mentioned do each of them singly, much more all of them together, shew such signal differences between the miracles recorded in the gospels and those ascribed to the Abbé de Paris, that it must argue a peculiar

\* M. de Montgeron indeed will not allow that the miraculous operations ceased at the shutting up of the tomb; but by the miraculous operations he principally understands the convulsions, which continued still to be carried on; but which many of the principal Jansenists were far from looking upon as tokens of a divine interposition.

† Crit. Gener. lettre v. p. 159, & seq.

degree of confidence to pretend to run a parallel between the one and the other, much more to affirm, as Mr. Hume has done, that the latter *much surpasss* the former in *credit and authority*. This only shews how gladly these gentlemen would lay hold on any pretence to invalidate the evidences of Christianity. Thus, Mr. Chubb, in a discourse he published on miracles, in which he pretends impartially to represent the reasonings on both sides, produced with great pomp a pretended miracle wrought in the Cevennes in 1703, and represented it as of equal credit with those of the gospel. M. le Moyné, in his answer to him, hath evinced the falsehood of that story in a manner that admits of no reply\*: and yet it is not improbable, that some future deist may see fit some time or other to revive that story, and oppose it to the miracles recorded in the New Testament.

Mr. Hume concludes his Essay with applauding his own performance, and is the better pleased with the *way of reasoning* he has made use of, as he thinks, “it may serve to confound those dangerous friends, or disguised enemies to the Christian religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion,” saith he, “is founded on faith, not on reason†: and it is a sure method of exposing  
“ it,

\* Le Moyné on Miracles, p. 422, &c.

† This author, who takes care to make the principles of his philosophy subservient to his designs against religion, in the fifth of his Philosophical Essays, where he undertakes to treat of the nature of belief, gives such an account of it as seems to exclude reason from any share in it at all. He makes the difference between *faith* and *fiction* to consist wholly in some sentiment of feeling, which is annexed to the former, not to the latter: That the sentiment of belief is nothing but the conception of an object more lively and forcible, more intense and steady than what attends the mere fiction of the imagination: and that this manner of conception arises from the customary conjunction of the object with something present to the memory or senses. See his Philosophical Essays, p. 80—84. This gentleman is here, as in many other places, sufficiently obscure, nor is it easy to form a distinct notion of what he intends. But his design seems to be to exclude reason or the understanding from having any thing to do with belief, as if reason never had any influence in producing, directing, or regulating it; which is to open a wide door to enthusiasm. But this is contrary to what we may all observe, and frequently experience. We in several cases clearly perceive, that we have reason to regard some things as fictitious, and others as true and real. And the reasons which show the difference between a fiction and a reality

“ it, to put it to such a trial, as it is by no means fitted to endure.” And he calls those, who undertake to defend religion by reason, *pretended Christians* \*. Such a mean and ungenerous sneer is below animadversion: all that can be gathered from it is, that these gentlemen are very uneasy at the attempts which have been made to defend Christianity in a way of reason and argument. They, it seems, are mightily concerned for *the preservation* of our holy faith, and in their great friendship for that cause would give it up as indefensible. And if the best way of befriending the Christian religion be to endeavour to subvert the evidences by which it is established, our author hath taken effectual care to convince the world of his friendly intentions towards it. As to the brief hints he hath given towards the end of his Essay against the Mosaic history, and the miracles recorded there, I shall not here take any notice of them, both because Mr. Adams hath clearly and succinctly obviated them, in his answer to that Essay, p. 88—94, and because I shall have occasion to resume this subject, when I come to make observations on Lord Bolingbroke’s *Posthumous Works*, who hath with great virulence and bitterness used his utmost efforts to expose the Mosaic writings.

reality shew, that we ought in reason to believe the one and not the other: and so reason may go before the sentiment of belief, and lay a just foundation for it, and be instrumental to produce it. And in this case the belief may be said to be strictly rational.

\* Hume’s Philosophical Essays, p. 204, 205.

## L E T T E R XX.

*Additional Observations relating to Mr. Hume—A Transcript of an ingenious Paper, containing an Examination of Mr. Hume's Arguments in his Essay on Miracles—Observations upon it—The Evidence of Matters of Fact may be so circumstanced as to produce a full Assurance—Mr. Hume artfully confounds the Evidence of past Facts with the Probability of the future—We may be certain of a Matter of Fact after it hath happened, though it might before-hand seem very improbable that it would happen—Where full Evidence is given of a Fact, there must not always be a Deduction made on the Account of its being unusual and extraordinary—There is strong and positive Evidence of the Miracles wrought in Attestation of Christianity, and no Evidence against them—The miraculous Nature of the Facts no Proof that the Facts were not done—A Summary of Mr. Hume's Argument against the Evidence of Miracles—The Weakness of it shewn—Considering the vast Importance of Religion to our Happiness, the bare Possibility of its being true should be sufficient to engage our Compliance.*

SIR,

THE four preceding letters comprehend all the observations that were made upon Mr. Hume in the second volume of the *View of the Deistical Writers*, 8vo. edit. But soon after that volume was published, I received a letter from a gentleman of sense and learning, which particularly relates to that part of it which was designed in answer to Mr. Hume. He was pleased to say it gave him *uncommon satisfaction*, and at the same time sent me a paper which he seemed to be very well pleased with, that had been drawn up by a young gentleman, then lately dead. It was designed as a confutation of Mr. Hume upon his own principles, which he thought had not been sufficiently attended to in the answers that had been made to that writer; and he allowed me, if I should be of opinion that any thing in it might be serviceable to a farther confutation of Mr. Hume, to make use  
of

of his sentiments either by way of note or appendix, as I should judge most convenient. I returned an answer, in a letter which I shall here insert, as it containeth some reflections that may be of advantage in relation to the controversy with Mr. Hume: but first it will be proper to lay before the reader the paper itself here referred to, which is concisely drawn, and runs thus:

AN EXAMINATION OF MR. HUME'S ARGUMENTS  
IN HIS  
ESSAY ON MIRACLES.

THE objects of human understanding may be distinguished either into propositions asserting the relation between general ideas, or matters of fact.

In the former kind, we can arrive at certainty, by means of a faculty in our souls, which perceives this relation either instantly or intimately, which is called Intuition, or else by intermediate ideas, which is called Demonstration.

But we can only form a judgment of the latter by experience. No reasoning *a priori* will discover to us, that water will suffocate, or the fire consume us, or that the loadstone will attract steel; and therefore no judgment can be made concerning the truth or falsehood of matters of fact, but what is constantly regulated by custom and experience, and can therefore never go higher than probability.

When we have frequently observed a particular event to happen in certain circumstances, the mind naturally makes an induction, that it will happen again in the same circumstances. When this observation has been long, constant, and uninterrupted, there our belief that it will happen again approaches infinitely near to certainty. Thus no man has the least doubt of the sun's rising to-morrow, or that the tide will ebb and flow at its accustomed periods: but where our observations are broke in upon by frequent interruptions and exceptions to the contrary, then we expect such an event with the least degree of assurance: and in all intermediate cases, our expectations are always in proportion to the constancy and regularity of the experience.

This method of reasoning is not connected by any medium or chain of steps, but is plainly to be observed in all animate beings,

brutes as well as men\*. And it would be as absurd to ask a reason, why we expect to happen again, that which has regularly come to pass a great many times before, as it is to inquire, why the mind perceives a relation between certain ideas.

They are both distinct faculties of the soul: and as it has been authorized by some writers of distinction, to give the denomination of sense to the internal as well as external perceptions, the one may be called the *speculative*, and the other the *probable sense*.

From this last-mentioned principle Mr. Hume has deduced an argument to shew, that there is great improbability against the belief of any miraculous fact, how well soever attested: and as religion may seem to be greatly affected by this conclusion (supposing it to be true), before we come directly to consider the argument, it may not be amiss to inquire how far religion, as a practical institution, may be concerned therein.

And for this purpose it is to be observed, that probable evidence for the truth or falsehood of any matter of fact differs essentially from demonstration, in that the former admits of degrees, in the greatest variety, from the highest moral certainty down to the lowest presumption; which the latter does not.

Let it also be further observed, that probable evidence is in its nature but an imperfect kind of information, the highest degree of which can never reach absolute certainty, or full proof: and yet to mankind, with regard to their practice, it is in many cases the very guide of their lives.

Most of our actions are determined by the highest degrees of probability; as for instance, what we do in consequence of the sun's rising to-morrow; of the seasons regularly succeeding one another; and that certain kinds of meat and drink will nourish. Others are determined by lesser degrees. Thus rhubarb does not always purge; nor is opium a soporific to every person that takes it; and yet for all that they are of constant use for these purposes in medicine. In all cases of moment, when to act or forbear may be attended with considerable damage, no wise man makes the least scruple of doing what he apprehends

\* May not the long sought after distinction between brutes and men consist in this: That whereas the human understanding comprehends both classes, the brutal sagacity is confined only to matters of fact?

may be of advantage to him, even though the thing was doubtful, and one side of the question as supportable as the other: but in matters of the utmost consequence, a prudent man will think himself obliged to take notice even of the lowest probability, and will act accordingly. A great many instances might be given in the common pursuits of life, where a man would be considered as out of his senses, who would not act, and with great diligence and application too, not only upon an over-chance, but even where the probability might be greatly against his success.

Suppose a criminal under sentence of death were promised a pardon, if he threw twelve with a pair of dice at one throw; here the probability is thirty-six to one against him, and yet he would be looked upon as mad if he did not try. Nothing in such a case would hinder a man from trying, but the absolute impossibility of the event.

Let us now apply this method of reasoning to the practice of religion. And supposing the arguments against miracles were far more probable than the evidence for them, yet the vast importance of religion to our happiness in every respect would still be very sufficient to recommend it to the practice of every prudent man; and the bare possibility that it might prove true, were there nothing else to support it, would engage his assent and compliance; or else he must be supposed to act differently in this respect to what he generally does in all the other concerns of his life. So that whether Mr. Hume's reasonings be true or false, religion has still sufficient evidence to influence the practice of every wise and considerate man.

This being premised, let us now proceed to consider Mr. Hume's arguments. His reasoning may be briefly expressed in this manner: We have had a long, universal, and uninterrupted experience, that no events have happened contrary to the course of nature, from constant and unvaried observations: we have therefore a full proof, that the uniform course has not been broke in upon, nor will be, by any particular exceptions. But the observation of truth depending upon, and constantly following human testimony, is by no means universal and uninterrupted, and therefore it does not amount to a full proof, that it either has, or will follow it in any particular instance. And therefore the proof arising from any human testimony can never



equal the proof that is deduced against a miracle from the very nature of the fact.

This I take to be a full and fair state of this gentleman's reasoning.

But the answer is very plain: if by human testimony, he would mean the evidence of any one single man indifferently taken, then indeed his second proposition would be true; but then the conclusion will by no means follow from it: but if by human testimony he would understand the evidence of any collection of men, then the second proposition is false, and consequently the conclusion must be so too.

That twelve honest persons should combine to assert a falsehood, at the hazard of their lives, without any view to private interest, and with the certain prospect of losing every thing that is and ought to be dear to mankind in this world, is, according to his own way of reasoning, as great a miracle, to all intents and purposes, as any interruption in the common course of nature; because no history has ever mentioned any such thing, nor has any man in any age ever had experience of such a fact.

But here it may be objected, that though it be allowed to be as great a miracle for twelve honest men to attest a falsehood, contrary to their plain interest in every respect, as that any alteration should happen in the common course of nature, yet these evidences being equal, they only destroy one another, and still leave the mind in suspense.

This objection draws all its force from Mr. Hume's assertion, that an uniform and uninterrupted experience amounts to a full proof, which when examined will not be found true; and indeed I wonder that a writer of his accuracy should venture on such an expression, since it is confessed on all hands, that all our reasonings concerning matters of fact ever fall short of certainty, or full proof.

And besides, the very same objection which he makes against the veracity of human testimony, to weaken its authenticity, may be retorted with equal force against his unvaried certainty of the course of nature; for doubtless the number of approved histories we have relating to miracles, will as much lessen the probability of what he calls a full proof on his side of the question, as all the forgeries and falsehoods that are brought to discredit

credit human testimony, will weaken it on the other. But the best way to be assured of the falsehood of this objection is to examine it by what we find in our own minds; for that must not be admitted as an universal principle, which is not true in every particular instance.

According to Mr. Hume, we have a full proof of any fact attested by twelve honest disinterested persons. But would not the probability be increased, and our belief of such a fact be the stronger, if the number of witnesses were doubled? I own, my mind immediately assents to it. But if this be true, it will then evidently follow, that the proof against a miracle, arising from the nature of the fact, may, and has been exceeded by contrary human testimony.

Suppose, as before, that the testimony of twelve persons is just equal to it, and we have the evidence of twenty for any particular miracle recorded in the Gospel; then subtracting the weaker evidence from the stronger, we shall have the positive evidence of eight persons, for the truth of a common matter of fact.

Q. E. D.

The answer I returned to the letter in which this paper was inclosed was in substance as follows:

SIR,

I AM very much obliged to you for the kind manner in which you have expressed yourself with regard to me: and it is a pleasure to me to find, that my reply to Mr. Hume is approved by a gentleman of so much good sense, and of such eminency in his profession, as I am well informed you are accounted to be.

I agree with you, that Mr. Hume is an elegant and subtle writer, and one of the most dangerous enemies to Christianity that has appeared among us. He has a very specious way of managing an argument. (But his subtilty seems to have qualified him not so much for clearing an obscure cause, as for puzzling a clear one.) Many things in his *Philosophical Essays* have a very plausible appearance, as well as an uncommon turn, which he visibly affects; but, upon a close examination of them, I think one may venture to pronounce, that few authors can be mentioned who have fallen into greater absurdities and inconsistencies. And it were to be wished there was not a sufficient ground for the se-

vere censure you pass upon him, when you say, that, "with all  
 "his art, he has plainly discovered a bad heart, by throwing out  
 "some bitter sneers against the Christian revelation, which are  
 "absolutely inconsistent with a serious belief, or indeed with any  
 "regard for it, though in some parts of his writings he affects a  
 "different way of speaking."

You observe, that "we seem to be greatly deficient in the logic of probability, a point which Mr. Hume had studied with great accuracy." And I readily own, that there is a great appearance of accuracy in what Mr. Hume hath advanced concerning the grounds and degrees of probability, and the different degrees of assent due to it. But though what he hath offered this way seems plausible in general, he hath been far from being fair or exact in his application of it.

The paper you have sent inclosed to me, and which you tell me was drawn up by the young gentleman you mention, contains a sketch of an attempt to shew how Mr. Hume might be confuted on his own principles, and is executed in such a manner, that one cannot but regret, that a gentleman of so promising a genius, and who might have proved signally useful, was snatched away by a fever about the twentieth year of his age. You allow me to make what use of it I judge proper, and seem to expect that I should tell you my sentiments of it with the utmost frankness and candour. And this obligeth me to acquaint you, that though I look upon the confutation of Mr. Hume in the way this gentleman hath managed it to be subtle and ingenious, yet in some things it doth not seem to me to be quite so clear and satisfactory, as were to be wished in a matter of so great consequence. He has, I think, from a desire of confuting Mr. Hume upon his own principles, been led to make too large concessions to that gentleman, and hath proceeded upon some of his principles as true and valid, which I think may be justly contested.

Mr. Hume frequently intimates, that there neither is nor can be any certainty in the evidence given concerning matters of fact, or in human testimony, which can be securely depended on; and that at best, it can be only probable. And the ingenious author of the paper, having observed, after Mr. Hume, that we can form no judgment concerning the truth or falsehood of matter of fact, but what is constantly regulated by custom or experience,

rience, adds, that “ it can never go higher than probability.” And again he saith, that “ probable evidence is in its nature but “ an imperfect kind of information; the highest degree of which “ cannot reach absolute certainty or full proof:” where he seems not to allow, that the evidence concerning matters of fact can ever arrive at such a certainty as to make up a *full proof*. And he repeats it again, that “ it is confessed on all hands, that all our reasonings concerning matters of fact ever fall short of certainty or “ full proof.” And yet if we allow Mr. Hume’s definition of a full proof, that it is *such an argument from experience as leaves no room for doubt or opposition*, the evidence for a matter of fact may be so circumstanced as to amount to a full proof, and even to a certainty; for I can see no reason for confining certainty to the evidence we have by intuition or by demonstration. In treating of certainty as distinguished from probability, a twofold certainty may very properly be allowed. The one is, the certainty by intuition or by demonstration. The other is, a certainty relating to matter of fact. This is indeed of a different kind from the former: but I think it may no less justly be called certainty, when it so fully satisfieth the mind, as to leave not the least room for doubt concerning it, and produceth a full assurance. And that this is often the case with relation to matters of fact cannot reasonably be denied. The words *sure* and *certain* are frequently applied in common language to things of this kind, and, for aught I can see, very properly. And in the best and exactest writers it is often described under the term of *moral certainty*, an expression which this gentleman himself makes use of\*. And it is a great mistake to imagine, that the word *moral* in that case

\* The ingenious gentleman seems to grant what may be sufficient, when he saith, that probability “ in some cases approaches infinitely near to certainty.” If it be allowed, that matter of fact may be so certain, that the mind may be fully assured of it, and so as to leave no room for a reasonable doubt, this is all that is really necessary in the present controversy. And this is what Mr. Hume himself seems sometimes to allow. But at other times he gives such an account of human testimony as tends to render it in all cases uncertain. And the design of his representing it as never rising higher than probability, seems to be to convey an idea of uncertainty and doubt as inseparably attending all human testimony. And to guard against the wrong use that may be made of this, is the design of what I have here observed.

is always used as a term of diminution, as if it were not to be entirely depended upon. It is only designed to shew that this certainty is of a different kind, and proceedeth upon different grounds, from that which ariseth from demonstration; but yet it may produce as strong an assurance in the mind, and which may undoubtedly be depended upon. That there was a war carried on in England in the last century between King and Parliament, I only know by human testimony. But will any man say, that for that reason I cannot be sure of it? Many cases might be mentioned with regard to matters of fact which we know by human testimony, the evidence of which is so strong and convincing, that we can no more reasonably doubt of it, than of the truth of any proposition which comes to us demonstrated by the strictest reasoning. Mr. Hume himself seems sensible, that it would be wrong to say, that every thing which is not matter of demonstration comes only under the notion of probability. And therefore though he frequently seems to class all matters of fact under the head of probabilities, yet in the beginning of his *Essay on Probability*, he seems to find fault with Mr. Locke for dividing all arguments into *demonstrative* and *probable*, and observes, that to conform our language more to common use, we should divide arguments into *demonstrations*, *proofs*, and *probabilities*: where he seems to place what he calls *proofs*, which he explains to be such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition, in a higher class than probabilities. And Mr. Locke himself, though he seems to confine certainty to demonstration, yet allows concerning some probabilities arising from human testimony, that “they rise so near to certainty, that they govern our thoughts as absolutely, and influence our actions as fully, as the most evident demonstration; and in what concerns us, we make little or no difference between them and certain knowledge. Our belief thus grounded rises to assurance\*.” And in that case I think probability is too low a word, and not sufficiently expressive, or properly applicable to things of this kind. For according to Mr. Locke’s account of it, and the common usage of the word, that is said to be probable

\* *Essay on Human Understanding*, book iv. chap. xv. sect. 6.

which

which is *likely to be true*, and of which we have *no certainty*, but only *some inducements*, as Mr. Locke speaks, to believe and receive them as true.

Another thing observable in Mr. Hume's reasoning on this subject is, that in treating of probability or the evidence of facts, which he foundeth wholly upon experience, he confoundeth the evidence of past facts with that of the future: and the young gentleman himself seems not sufficiently to distinguish them. The instances he produceth to shew, that the judgments which the mind forms concerning the probability of events *will always be in proportion to the constancy and regularity of the experience*; all relate to the probability of future events from the experience of the past. But the question about the probability of any future fact hath properly nothing to do in the present controversy between Mr. Hume and his adversaries, which relateth wholly to the evidence of past facts; and it is only an instance of this writer's art, that, by confounding these different questions, he may perplex the debate, and throw dust in the eyes of his readers. It will be granted, that with relation to future facts or events, the utmost evidence we can attain to from past observation or experience is a high degree of probability; but with relation to past matters of fact, we may in many cases arrive at a certainty, or what Mr. Hume calls a full proof: yea it often happens, that the evidence of past facts may be so circumstanced, that we may be certain that such an event really came to pass, though, if the question had been put before the event, the probability from past experience would have been greatly against it. Nothing therefore can be more weak and fallacious than Mr. Hume's reasoning, when from this principle of forming conclusions concerning future events from past experience, he endeavours to deduce an argument against the belief of any miraculous fact, how well soever attested. For though, if the question were concerning a future miracle in any particular instance, if we should judge merely from past experience, the probability might seem to lie against it; yet if the question be concerning a past miraculous fact, there may be such proof of it, as may not leave room for a reasonable doubt that the miracle was really done, though before it was done it might seem highly improbable that it would be done,

Another

Another fallacy Mr. Hume is guilty of, is his supposing that in all cases where the fact, in itself considered, is unusual, and out of the way of common experience, whatever be the evidence given for it, there must still be a deduction made, and the assent given to it is always weakened in proportion to the unusualness of the fact. Now this doth not always hold. A fact of an extraordinary nature may come to us confirmed by an evidence so strong, as to produce a full and undoubted assurance of its having been done: and in such a case there is no deduction to be made; nor is the assent we give to the truth of the fact at all weakened on the account of its being unusual and extraordinary. Thus, *e. g.* that a great king should be openly put to death by his own subjects, upon a pretended formal trial before a court of judicature, is very unusual, and before it came to pass would have appeared highly improbable; but after it happened, there is such evidence of the fact as to produce a full assurance that it was really done; and the man who should go about seriously to make a doubt of it, and make a formal deduction from the credit of the evidence, on the account of the strangeness of the fact, and should pretend that we must believe it with an assent only proportioned to the evidence which remaineth after that deduction, would, under pretence of extraordinary accuracy, only render himself ridiculous. It will indeed be readily owned, that more and greater evidence may be justly required with regard to a thing that is unusual and out of the common course, than is required for a common fact; but when there is evidence given sufficient to satisfy the mind, its being unusual and extraordinary ought not to be urged as a reason for not giving a full credit to it, or for pretending that the testimony concerning it is not to be depended upon. For the evidence for a fact out of the course of common observation and experience may be so circumstanced, as to leave no room for the least reasonable doubt; and the assent to it may be as strong and firm as to any the most common and ordinary event: nor is any thing in that case to be deducted from the credit of the evidence, under pretence of the fact's being unusual or even miraculous.

You will allow me on this occasion to take notice of a passage in your letter, in which, after having observed that Mr. Hume had studied the point about probability, and treated upon it with  
great

great accuracy, you give it as your opinion, that “the best way of answering him would be in the way himself has chalked out, by comparing the degrees of probability in the evidence on both sides, and deducting the inferior.” Here you seem to suppose, that there is evidence on both sides in the case of miracles, and that, upon balancing the evidence, that which hath the higher degrees of probability ought to be preferred, at the same time making a deduction from it in proportion to the weight of the contrary evidence. But the supposition you here proceed upon appears to me to be a wrong one, *viz.* that in the case in question there is evidence on both sides, and consequently an opposition of evidence, *i. e.* evidence against the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, as well as evidence for them. There is indeed positive strong evidence on one side, to shew that those facts were really done: an evidence drawn from testimony so circumstantiated, that it hath all the qualifications which could be reasonably desired to render it full and satisfactory\*. But what evidence is there on the other side? No counter-evidence or testimony to shew the falsehood of this is pretended by Mr. Hume to be produced; nor are there any circumstances mentioned, attending the evidence itself, which may justly tend to render it suspicious. Nothing is opposed to it but the miraculous nature of the facts, or their being contrary to the usual course of nature; and this cannot properly be said to be any evidence to prove that the facts were not done, or that the testimony given to them was false. Nor needs there any deduction to be made in the assent we give to such a full and sufficient testimony as is here supposed, on that account: because, as the case was circumstanced, it was proper that those facts should be beyond and out of the common course of nature and experience: and it was agreeable to the wisdom of God, and to the excellent ends for which those facts were designed, that they should be so: since otherwise they would not have answered the intention, which was to give a divine attestation to an important revelation of the highest use and benefit to mankind.

It is an observation of the ingenious author of the paper you sent me, “That twelve honest persons should combine to assert

\* See this fully shewn in answer to Mr. Hume, p. 280, & seq.

“ a false-



“ a falsehood, at the hazard of their lives, without any view to  
 “ private interest, and with the certain prospect of losing every  
 “ thing that is and ought to be dear to mankind in this world,  
 “ is, according to Mr. Hume’s own way of reasoning, as great  
 “ a miracle, to all intents and purposes, as any interruption in  
 “ the common course of nature.” But then he observes, that  
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 serves, that “ this objection draws all its force from Mr. Hume’s  
 “ assertion, that an uniform and uninterrupted experience is a  
 “ full proof, which when examined will not be found true, be-  
 “ cause it is confessed on all hands, that all our reasonings con-  
 “ cerning matters of fact ever fall short of certainty, or full  
 “ proof.” But besides that this doth not always hold, since it has  
 been shewn, that our reasonings concerning matters of fact may  
 in some cases amount to such a certainty as may be justly called  
 a full proof, it may still be urged, that an uniform uninterrupted  
 experience, though not strictly a full proof, yet is such a proof  
 against a miracle as is able to counterbalance the evidence for it :  
 in which case the objection still holds, and the mind is kept in  
 suspense. And the gentleman himself seems afterwards to grant,  
 that a fact’s being contrary to the usual course of nature afford-  
 eth such a proof against it from the nature of the thing, as is suf-  
 ficient to counterpoise the evidence of twelve such witnesses as  
 are supposed, though he thinks it would not do so, if the num-  
 ber of witnesses were doubled; and that this shews that the proof  
 against a miracle arising from the nature of the fact may be ex-  
 ceeded by contrary human testimony, which is what Mr. Hume  
 denies. And he argues, that if we suppose the testimony of  
 twelve persons for a miracle to be just equal to the evidence  
 arising from the nature of the thing against it, and that we have  
 the evidence of twenty for any particular miracle recorded in  
 the Gospel, then subtracting the weaker evidence from the  
 stronger, we shall have a surplus of the positive testimony of  
 eight persons, without any thing to oppose it.

I am persuaded, that the design of the ingenious gentleman, in  
 putting

putting the case after this manner, was to signify it as his real opinion, that the testimony of twelve such witnesses as are here supposed, in proof of a miracle's having been really wrought, did not more than countervail the argument against it arising from the strangeness of the fact: but he had a mind to put the case as strongly as he could in favour of Mr. Hume, and yet to shew, that there might still be an excess of proof, according to his own account, on the side of miracles; which destroys his main hypothesis, that the evidence for a miracle can never exceed the evidence against it. It appears to me however, that this is making too large a concession, and that it is not the properest way of putting the case. It proceedeth upon the supposition, which hath been already shewn to be a wrong one, that a thing's being miraculous, or contrary to the usual course of nature, is alone in all circumstances a proper *proof* or *evidence* against the truth of the fact; whereas the case may be so circumstanced, that the miraculoufness of the fact is in reality no *proof* or *evidence* against it at all. It will indeed be acknowledged, as was before hinted, that greater evidence is required with regard to a fact which is miraculous, than for any fact in the common and ordinary course. But when such evidence is given, to prove that a miraculous fact was really done, as is suitable to the importance of the fact, and which cannot be rejected without admitting suppositions which are manifestly absurd; in such a case, a thing's being miraculous is no just reason for not giving a full assent to the testimony concerning it. For its being miraculous, in the case that hath been put, hath nothing in it absurd or incredible; whereas that twelve men of sound minds and honest characters should combine to attest a falsehood, in opposition to all their worldly interests and prejudices, and to every principle that can be supposed to influence human nature, without any assignable cause for such a conduct (which has been shewn to be the case with regard to the witnesses for Christianity), is absolutely absurd, nor can in any way be accounted for. As to the pretence, that in this case there is a miracle on both sides, and that the one is to be opposed to the other, and destroys its evidence; this sophism, which has imposed upon many, and in which the chief strength of Mr. Hume's essay lies, deriveth its whole force from an abuse of the word miracle, and a confounding, as this writer  
hath

hath artfully done, a miracle and an absurdity, as if it were the same thing. That twelve men should, in the circumstances supposed, combine to attest a falsehood, at the hazard of their lives and of every thing dear to men, cannot properly be called a miracle, according to any definition that can be reasonably given of a miracle, or even according to Mr. Hume's own definition of a miracle, that "it is a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposal of some invisible agent:" but is a manifest absurdity. But in the case of an extraordinary event, contrary to the usual course of natural causes, and wrought for a very valuable purpose, and by a power adequate to the effect, there is indeed a proper miracle, but no absurdity at all. It is true, that its being unusual and out of the ordinary course of observation and experience, is a good reason for not believing it without a strong and convincing evidence, a much stronger evidence than would be necessary in common and ordinary facts. But when there is an evidence of its having actually been done, which hath all the requisites that can be justly demanded in such a case, and at the same time sufficient reasons are assigned, worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, to shew that it was proper to be done, its being unusual and extraordinary is no proof at all that it hath not been done, nor can in any propriety of language be called an *evidence* against it; and therefore no subtraction is to be made from the credit given to such a supposed full and sufficient evidence merely on this account. Perhaps my meaning will be better understood, by applying it to a particular instance: and I choose to mention that which is the principal miracle in proof of Christianity, our Lord's resurrection. The fact itself was evidently miraculous, and required a divine power to accomplish it. It was therefore necessary, in order to lay a just foundation for believing it, that there should be such an evidence given as was proportioned to the importance and extraordinariness of the fact. And that the evidence which was given of it was really such an evidence, appears, I think, plainly from what I have elsewhere observed concerning it\*. But if we should put the case thus: that not only was the fact extraordinary in itself, and out of the

\* See above, p. 275, & seq.

common course of nature, but the evidence given of it was insufficient, and not to be depended upon, and had circumstances attending it which brought it under a just suspicion: or, if contrary evidence was produced to invalidate it; *e. g.* if the soldiers that watched the sepulchre, instead of pretending that the body of Jesus was stolen away whilst they were asleep, which was no evidence at all, and was a plain acknowledgment that they knew nothing at all of the matter, had declared that the disciples came with a powerful band of armed men, and overpowered the guard, and carried away the body: or, if any of the Jews had averred, that they were present and awake when the soldiers slept, and that they saw the disciples carry away the body: or, if any of the disciples to whom Jesus appeared, and who professed to have seen and conversed with him after his resurrection, had afterwards declared, that they were among the disciples at those times when he was pretended to have appeared, and that they saw no such appearances, nor heard any such conversations as were pretended. On this supposition, it might be properly said that there was evidence given on both sides, *viz.* for and against Christ's resurrection, and consequently that there was a real opposition of evidence; in which case it would be necessary carefully to examine the evidences, and compare them one with another, in order to judge which of them deserved the greater credit, and how far one of them weakened or impaired the force of the other. But as the case was circumstanced, since there was a very strong positive evidence given, that Christ really rose from the dead, and shewed himself alive after his resurrection by many infallible proofs, and no contrary evidence produced against it, nor any thing alleged to render the evidence that was given of it justly suspected; and since there are also very good reasons assigned, worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness, which rendered it highly proper that Christ should be raised from the dead: on this view of the case, the extraordinariness of the fact, alone considered, cannot properly be called an *evidence* against the truth of it, nor be justly urged as a reason for not yielding a full assent to the evidence concerning it: for it was necessary to the ends proposed by the divine wisdom, that the fact should be of an extraordinary and miraculous nature; and if it had not been so, it would not have answered those ends. I think therefore it may  
justly

justly be affirmed, that, taking the case in all its circumstances, considering the great strength and force of the evidence that is given for the fact, and the many concurring proofs and attestations by which it was confirmed, together with the excellent and important ends for which it was designed, there is as just ground to believe that Christ rose again from the dead, as that he was crucified; though the latter be a fact not out of the ordinary course of nature, and the former was evidently so. And here it may not be improper to mention a remarkable observation of Mr. Locke. He had, in giving an account of the grounds of probability, supposed one ground of it to be the conformity of a thing with *our own knowledge, observation, and experience*: and after taking notice of several things to this purpose, he observes, that “ though common experience and the ordinary course of  
 “ things have justly a mighty influence on the minds of men, to  
 “ make them give or refuse credit to any thing proposed to their  
 “ belief, yet there is one case wherein the strangeness of the fact  
 “ lessens not the assent to a fair testimony given of it: for where  
 “ such supernatural events are suitable to ends aimed at by him  
 “ who has the power to change the course of nature; there un-  
 “ der such circumstances they may be fitter to procure belief, by  
 “ how much the more they are beyond or contrary to common  
 “ observation. This is the proper case of miracles, which, well  
 “ attested, do not only find credit themselves, but give it also to  
 “ other truths which need such a confirmation\*.

Thus this great master of reason is so far from thinking with Mr. Hume, that a thing's being miraculous, or beyond the common course of observation and experience, absolutely destroys all evidence of testimony that can be given concerning the truth of the fact, that in his opinion it doth not so much as lessen the assent given to it upon a fair testimony; provided the supernatural facts thus attested were suitable to the ends of the divine wisdom and goodness, *i. e.* wrought in attestation to a revelation of the highest importance, and of the most excellent tendency; and that in that case the more evidently miraculous the fact is, the fitter it is to answer the end proposed by it.

The ingenious author of the paper you sent me has very pro-

\* Locke's Essay on Human Understanding, book iv. chap. xvi. sec. 13.

perly summed up Mr. Hume's argument against the evidence of miracles, thus: We have had a long, universal, and uninterrupted experience, that no events have happened contrary to the course of nature, from constant and unvaried observations. We have therefore a full proof, that this uniform course has not been broken in upon, nor will be, by any particular exceptions.

But the observation of truth depending upon, and constantly following human testimony, is by no means universal and uninterrupted: and therefore it does not amount to a full proof, that it either has or will follow in any particular instance.

And therefore the proof arising from any human testimony, can never equal the proof that is deduced against a miracle from the very nature of the fact.

This he takes to be a full and fair state of Mr. Hume's reasoning: and it appears to me to be so. And he says, "The answer is plain. If by human testimony he would mean of any one single man indifferently taken, then his second proposition would be true; but then the conclusion would by no means follow from it: but if by human testimony he would understand the evidence of any collection of men, then the second proposition is false, and consequently the conclusion is so too."

This answer relateth only to the second proposition\*. But it might have been said, that neither of the propositions are to be depended upon, and that they are utterly insufficient to support the conclusion he would draw from them. For as to the first proposition, it assumes the very point in question: it affirms, that no events have ever happened contrary to the course of nature; and that this we know by a long, universal, and uninterrupted experience. If this be meant universal and uninterrupted experience of all mankind in all ages, which alone can be of any

\* Though the ingenious gentleman hath not directly and formally answered the first proposition, yet he has plainly shewn that he doth not admit it, when he saith, that "the very same objection Mr. Hume makes against the veracity of human testimony, to weaken its authenticity, may be retorted with equal force against his unvaried certainty of the course of nature. And that doubtless the many approved histories we have relating to miracles, will as much lessen the probability of what he calls a full proof on his side of the question, as all the forgeries and falsehoods that are brought to discredit human testimony will weaken it on the other."

force in the present argument, how doth it appear that we know by universal and uninterrupted experience, that no such events have ever happened? Are there not several events of this kind recorded by credible testimonies to have happened? The whole argument then is upon a wrong foundation. It proceedeth upon an universal and uninterrupted experience, not broken in upon in any instance. And there is good testimony to prove, that it hath been broken in upon in several instances. And if it hath been broken in upon in any instances, no argument can be brought from experience to prove that it hath not, or may not be broken in upon; and so the whole reasoning falls. If it be alledged, that these testimonies, or indeed any testimonies at all, ought not to be admitted in this case, the question returns, For what reason ought they not to be admitted? If the reason be, as it must be according to Mr. Hume, because there is an universal uninterrupted experience against them, this is to take it for granted, that no such events have ever happened: for if there have been any instances of such events, the experience is not universal and uninterrupted. So that we see what the boasted argument against miracles from uniform experience comes to. It in effect comes to this, that no such events have ever happened, because no such events have ever happened.

As to the second proposition, though if we speak of human testimony in general, it will be easily allowed, that it is not to be absolutely and universally depended upon; yet, as hath been already hinted, it may in particular instances be so circumstanced, as to yield a satisfying assurance, or what may not improperly be called a full proof. Even the testimony of a particular person may in some cases be so circumstanced, as to leave no room for reasonable suspicion or doubt. But especially if we speak of what this gentleman calls *a collection of men*, this may in some cases be so strong, as to produce a full and entire conviction, however improbable the attested fact might otherwise appear to be. And therefore if we meet with any testimonies relating to particular events of an extraordinary nature, they are not immediately to be rejected, under pretence of their being contrary to past experience; but we must carefully examine the evidence brought for them, whether it be of such a kind as to make it reasonable for us to believe them: and that the evidence brought

brought for the miraculous facts recorded in the gospel are of this kind hath been often clearly shewn.

The only farther reflection I shall make on this gentleman's paper is, that it contains good and proper observations concerning our being determin'd in matters of practice by probabilities: That in all cases of moment, where to act or forbear may be attended with considerable damage, no wise man makes the least scruple of doing what he apprehends may be of advantage to him, even though the thing were doubtful: but in matters of the utmost consequence, a prudent man will think himself obliged to take notice of the lowest probability, and will act accordingly. This he applies to the practice of religion, and observes, that considering the vast importance of religion to our happiness in every respect, — the bare possibility that it might prove true, were there nothing else to support it, would engage his assent and compliance: or else he must be supposed to act differently in this respect to what he generally does in all the other concerns of his life.

This observation is not entirely new, but it is handsomely illustrated by this gentleman, and seems very proper to shew, that those who neglect and despise religion, do in this, notwithstanding their boasted pretences, act contrary to the plain dictates of reason and good sense. But we need not have recourse to this supposition. The evidence on the side of religion is vastly superior. And if this be the case, no words can sufficiently express the folly and unreasonableness of their conduct, who take up with slight prejudices and presumptions in opposition to it; and by choosing *darkness rather than light*, and rejecting *the great salvation* offered in the Gospel, run the utmost hazard of exposing themselves to a heavy condemnation and punishment.

Thus I have taken the liberty you allowed me of giving my thoughts upon the paper you sent me. I cannot but look upon the young gentleman's attempt to be a laudable and ingenious one, though there are some things in his way of managing the argument, which seem not to have been thoroughly considered, and which, I am satisfied, he would have altered, if he had lived to take an accurate review of the subject.

This, with a few additions since made to it, is the substance of the answer I returned to the worthy gentleman who had written to



me, and which I have here inserted, because there are some things in it that may tend to the farther illustration of what I had offered in my remarks on Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*. My next will contain some additional observations relating to the Abbé de Paris, and the miracles attributed to him; together with reflections on some passages in Mr. Hume's *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, which seem to be intended to expose Christianity.

## LETTER XXI.

*Some Reflections on the extraordinary Sanctity ascribed to the Abbé de Paris—He carried Superstition to a strange Excess, and by his extraordinary Austerities voluntarily hastened his own Death—His Character and Course of Life, of a different kind from that rational and solid Piety and Virtue which is recommended in the Gospel.—Observations on some Passages in Mr. Hume's Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals—He reckons Self-denial, Mortification, and Humility among the Monkish Virtues, and represents them as not only useless, but as having a bad Influence on the Temper and Conduct—The Nature of Self-denial explained, and its great Usefulness and Excellence shewn—What is to be understood by the Mortification required in the Gospel—This also is a reasonable and necessary Part of our Duty—Virtue, according to Mr. Hume, hath nothing to do with Sufferance—But by the Acknowledgment of the wisest Moralists, one important Office of it is to support and bear us up under Adversity—The Nature of Humility explained—It is an excellent and amiable Virtue.*

SIR,

**T**HE miracles of the Abbé de Paris have made so great a noise in the world, and so much advantage hath been taken of them by the enemies of Christianity, and particularly by Mr. Hume, that I thought it necessary to consider them pretty largely above in the nineteenth Letter. Some things have occurred since, which have some relation to that matter, and which I shall here take notice of.

In that Letter, p. 352, mention is made of the high opinion the people had conceived of the Abbé's extraordinary sanctity, as what tended very much to raise their expectations of miracles to be wrought at his tomb, and by his intercession. If we inquire whence this opinion of his extraordinary sanctity arose, and upon what it was founded, we shall find it to have been principally owing to the excessive austerities in which he exercised himself for several years; of which therefore, and of some remarkable

things in his life and his character, it may not be improper to give some account. The particulars I shall mention are set forth at large by the learned Mr. Mosheim, in a dissertation on the miracles of the Abbé de Paris, and which I did not meet with till after the publication of the second volume of the *View of the Deistical Writers*. It is intitled, *Inquisitio in veritatem miraculorum Francisci de Paris sæculi nostri thaumaturgi* \*. What he there tells us concerning Mons. de Paris is faithfully taken from those who hold him in the highest admiration, the Jansenistical writers. And from their accounts it sufficiently appears, that his whole life, and especially the latter part of it, was one continued scene of the most absurd superstition, and which he carried to an excess that may be thought to border upon madness.

He was the eldest son of an ancient, rich, and honourable family, and therefore born to an opulent fortune: though his father, when he saw his turn of mind, very prudently left him but a part of it, and that in the hands and under the care of his younger brother. But though he still had an ample provision made for him, he voluntarily deprived himself of all the conveniencies, and even the necessaries, of life. He chose one obscure hole or cottage after another to live in, and often mixed with beggars, whom he resembled so much in his customs, sordid and tattered garb, and whole manner of his life, that he was sometimes taken for one, and was never better pleased, than when this exposed him in the streets and ways to derision and contempt. Poverty was what he so much affected, that though he applied to his brother for what his father had left him yet that he might not have the appearance of being rich, he chose not to take it as what was legally due to him, but to supplicate for it in the humblest terms, as for an aim freely bestowed upon a miserable object that had nothing of his own. And yet afterwards in his last will, he disposed of it as his own to various uses as he thought fit, especially for the benefit of those who had been sufferers for the Jansenist cause. For several of the last years of his life, he seemed to make it his business to contrive ways to weaken or harass, and torment his body, and thereby hasten his own death.

\* Vide Jo. Laur. Mosheimii Dissertationum ad Historiam Ecclesiasticam pertinentium volumen secundum,

Whilst he gave away his income to the poor, he himself voluntarily endured all the evils and hardships which attended the extremity of want and poverty. Mean and wretched was his garb; black bread, water, and herbs, but without oil, salt, or vinegar, or any thing to give them savour, was his only sustenance, and that but once a day. He lay upon the ground, and was worn away with continual watching. After his death were found, his hair shirt, an iron cross, a girdle, stomacher, and bracelets of the same metal, all bestuck with sharp points. These were the instruments of penitence, with which he was wont to chastise himself, the plain marks of which he bore on his body. By such a course he brought himself not only into great weakness of body, but into disorders of mind: and this, which was the natural effect of his manner of living, he attributed to the influence of the devil, whom God had in just judgment permitted to punish him for his sins. And in inquiring into the causes of the divine displeasure, he fixed upon this, that he had still too great a love for human learning and knowledge, and therefore from thenceforth did all he could to divest himself of it, and would have sold his well-furnished library, if he had not been prevented by some of his friends, whose interest it was to preserve it. For two years together he refused to come to the holy supper, under pretence that it was not lawful for him to come, God having required him to abstain from it; and it was with great difficulty that he was brought to it at last, by the threatenings and even reproaches of his confessor. Finally, that no kind of misery might be wanting to him, he chose for his companion, to dwell with him in his cottage, a man that was looked upon to be crazy, and who treated him in the most injurious manner. He did all he could to hide himself from his friends, in one sorry cottage after another; and about a month before his death, fixed himself in a little lodge in the corner of a garden, exposed to the sun and wind. When by such severities he had brought himself into an universal bad habit of body, and it was visible to his friends, that if he continued in that course he could not long support under it, a physician was called in, who only desired him to remove to a more commodious habitation, to allow himself more sleep, and a better diet, and especially to take nourishing broths for restoring his enfeebled constitution. But all the per-

suasions of his physician, confessor, and of his friends, and the tears of an only brother, could not prevail with him to follow an advice so reasonable and practicable; though he was assured, that, if he used that method, there was great hope of his recovery, and that his life could not be preserved without it. And when at last, to satisfy their importunity, he seemed so far to comply, as to be willing to take some broth, it was only an appearance of complying, for he took care to give such orders to the person who was to prepare it for him, that it really yielded little or no nourishment. Thus it was manifest, that he had determined to hasten, as much as in him lay, his own death. And accordingly he told his confessor, that this life had nothing in it to make it worth a Christian's care to preserve it. His friends acknowledge, that his death was the effect "of the almost incredible austerities that he exercised during the last four years of his life." His great admirer the Abbé de Asfeld testifies, that he heard him declare it as his purpose to yield himself a flow sacrifice to divine justice. ~ a ~

This his extraordinary course of austerities, together with the zeal he expressed to the very last for the Jansenist cause, which he shewed also by the dispositions he made in his will, as well as by his appealing, as with his dying breath, to a future general council against the constitution *Unigenitus*, procured him so extraordinary a reputation, that he has passed for one of the greatest saints that ever appeared in the Christian church. No sooner was he dead, but an innumerable multitude of people ran to his corpse, some of whom kissed his feet, others cut off part of his hair as a remedy against all manner of evil; others brought books or bits of cloth to touch his body, as believing it filled with a divine virtue. Thus were they prepared to believe and expect the most wonderful things.

Whosoever impartially considers the several things that have been mentioned, and which are amply verified in the places referred to in the margin\*, will not think the learned Mosheim in the wrong, when he pronounceth, that it cannot in consistency with reason be supposed, that God should extraordinarily interpose by his own divine power, to do honour to the bones and

\* See Mosheim, ut supra, from p. 364. to p. 395.

ashes of a man weak and superstitious to a degree of folly, and who was knowingly and wilfully accessory to his own death. In vain do his admirers, as he himself had done, extol his thus destroying himself as an offering up himself a voluntary sacrifice to divine justice. If a man should under the same pretence dispatch himself at once with a pistol or poniard, would this be thought a proper justification of his conduct? And yet I see not why the pretence might not as well hold in the one case as in the other; since it makes no great difference, whether the death was swifter or slower, provided it was brought on with a deliberate intention and design.

How different is this from the beautiful and noble idea of piety and virtue which the Gospel furnisheth us with, and from the perfect pattern of moral excellence which is set us by our blessed Saviour himself in his own holy life and practice! That the great apostle St. Paul was far from encouraging such austerities as tended to hurt and destroy the bodily health, sufficiently appears from the advice he gave to Timothy, *Drink no longer water, but use a little wine, for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities*—1 Tim. v. 23. He condemneth those that, under pretence of extraordinary purity, were for observing the *ordinances and traditions* of men, *Touch not, taste not, handle not;* and brands their practice under the name of *will-worship*, a *voluntary humility*, and *neglecting*, or, as the word might be rendered, *not sparing the body*, Col. ii. 20, 21, 22, 23. That which in the case of Abbé de Paris is cried up by his admirers as a carrying religion to the highest degree of perfection, *viz.* his abstaining from flesh, and confining himself to herbs, is represented by the apostle Paul as a sign of weakness in the faith—Rom. xiv. 2.

It hath always appeared to me to be the glory of the Christian religion, as prescribed in the New Testament, that the piety it teacheth us is solid and rational, remote from all superstitious extremes, worthy of a God of infinite wisdom and goodness to require, and becoming the true dignity of the reasonable nature. It comprehendeth not only immediate acts of devotion towards God, but a diligent performance of all relative duties, and the faithful discharge of the various offices incumbent upon us in the civil and social life. It requireth us indeed to bear with a noble  
fortitude

fortitude the greatest evils, when we are regularly called to suffer for the cause of God, but not rashly to expose ourselves to those evils, or to bring them upon ourselves.

The wise and beneficent author of nature hath stored the whole world about us with a variety of benefits: and can it be thought to be agreeable to his will, that, instead of tasting his goodness in the blessings he vouchsafeth us, we should make a merit of never allowing ourselves to enjoy them? How much more rational is it to receive those blessings with thankfulness, and enjoy them with temperance, according to that of St. Paul—*Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer,* 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. Can it be pleasing to our merciful heavenly Father, that we should not merely humble and chasten ourselves on special occasions, but make it our constant business to torment ourselves, and to impair and destroy the bodies he hath given us, and thereby unfit ourselves for the proper offices of life? Is it reasonable to imagine, that under the mild dispensation of the Gospel, which breathes an ingenuous cheerful spirit, and raiseth us to the noble liberty of the children of God, the best way of recommending ourselves to his favour should be to deny ourselves all the comforts he affordeth us, and to pass our lives in perpetual sadness and abstinence? Could it be said in that case, that *godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come?* 1 Tim. iv. 8. It is true, that mortification and self-denial are important gospel duties, but how different from the extremes of superstitious rigour will appear, when I come to vindicate the evangelical morality against the objections of Mr. Hume. It was not till Christians began to degenerate from that lovely form of rational, solid piety and virtue, of which Christ himself exhibited the most perfect example, that they laid so mighty a stress on those severe and rigorous austerities, which neither our Saviour nor his apostles had commanded. And in this respect some of those who were anciently deemed heretical sects carried it to a greater degree of strictness than the orthodox themselves. And many zealots there have been in false religions, and particularly some of the heathen devotees in the East Indies, who in severe penances, and rigid austerities, and in voluntary torments inflicted

flitted on their own bodies, have far exceeded the Abbé de Paris himself.

I think no farther observations need be made with regard to Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, which is directly levelled against Christianity. But any one that is acquainted with his writings must be sensible, that he often takes occasion to throw out insinuations against religion, which he usually represents either under the notion of superstition or enthusiasm. Even the morals of the gospel have not escaped his censure, though their excellence is such as to have forced acknowledgments from some of those who have been strongly prejudiced against it.

There is a passage to this purpose in his *Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, which deserves particular notice. In that Inquiry, as in all his other works, he assumes the merit of making new discoveries, and placing things in a better light than any man had done before him; and wonders that a theory so *simple and obvious* as that which he hath advanced, *could have escaped the most elaborate scrutiny and examination\**. I will not deny that there are in that Inquiry some good and curious observations; but I can see little that can be properly called new in his theory of morals, except his extending the notion of virtue (and it is concerning the principles of morals, and therefore concerning moral virtue, that his Inquiry proceeds) so as to comprehend under it every agreeable quality and accomplishment, such as *wit, ingenuity, eloquence, quickness of conception, facility of expression, delicacy of taste* in the finer arts, *politeness*†,

\* Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 172.

† It has been hinted to me by a worthy friend, that some have thought I did wrong in not allowing *politeness* to be ranked among the moral virtues. And therefore to prevent mistakes, I now observe, that if by *politeness* be meant a kind, obliging behaviour, expressive of humanity and benevolence, and flowing from it, it may be justly reckoned among the virtues: and in this sense a plain countryman, who is good-natured and obliging in his deportment to the utmost of his power, may be said to be truly a polite man. But this seems not to be the usual acceptation of the word in our language. By *politeness* is commonly understood a being well versed in the forms of what is usually called *good breeding*, and a genteel behaviour. And taken in that sense, however agreeable and ornamental it may be, I apprehend it is not properly a moral virtue; nor is the want of it a vice. And I believe it will scarce be denied, that a man may be really a good and worthy person, and yet not be what the world calls a polite well-bred man.

*cleanliness,*



*cleanliness, and even force of body*\*. I cannot see what valuable end it can answer in a treatise of morals to extend the notion of virtue so far. It is of high importance to mankind rightly to distinguish things that are morally good and excellent from those which are not so; and therefore great care should be taken, that both our ideas of these things, and the expressions designed to signify them, should be kept distinct. Wit, eloquence, and what we call natural parts, as well as acquired learning, politeness, cleanliness, and even strength of body, are no doubt real advantages, and when under a proper direction, and rightly applied, are both ornamental and useful, and are therefore not to be neglected, but, as far as we are able, to be cultivated and improved. This will be easily acknowledged: and if this be all Mr. Hume intends, it is far from being a new discovery. But these things make properly no part of moral virtue; nor can a man be said to be good and virtuous on the account of his being possessed of those qualities. He may have wit, eloquence, a polite behaviour, a fine taste in the arts, great bodily strength and resolution, and yet be really a bad man. And when these things are separated from good dispositions of the heart, from probity, benevolence, fidelity, integrity, gratitude, instead of rendering a man useful to the community, they qualify him for doing a great deal of mischief. These qualities therefore should be carefully distinguished from those which constitute a good moral character, and which ought to be principally recommended to the esteem and approbation of mankind, as having in themselves a real invariable worth and excellence, and as deriving a merit and value to every other quality. Nor is it proper, in a treatise of morals, which pretends to any degree of accuracy, to confound them all together under one common appellation of virtue.

And as Mr. Hume enlargeth his notion of virtue, so as to take in several things that do not seem properly to belong to the moral dispositions and qualities, so he excludeth from that character some things which are recommended in the gospel as of importance to the moral temper and conduct, particularly humility and self-denial. He observes, that "celibacy, fasting, penance,

\* See the 6th, 7th, and 8th sections of the Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, particularly p. 127, 128. 131. 135. 137. 162. 165.

"mortification,

“ mortification, self-denial, humility, solitude, and the whole  
 “ train of monkish virtues, are every-where rejected by men of  
 “ sense, because they serve no manner of purpose: they neither  
 “ advance a man’s fortune in the world, nor render him a more  
 “ valuable member of society, neither qualify him for the enter-  
 “ tainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoy-  
 “ ment—On the contrary, they cross all these desirable ends,  
 “ stupify the understanding, and harden the heart, obscure the  
 “ fancy, and sour the temper\*.” Our author is here pleased  
 to class *humility, mortification, and self-denial*, which are evi-  
 dently required in the gospel, with *penances, celibacy*, and what  
 he calls the monkish virtues; and pronounceth concerning all  
 alike, that they are rejected by all *men of sense*, and not only serve  
 no manner of purpose, but have a bad influence in stupifying  
 the understanding, hardening the heart, and souring the temper.  
 This is no doubt to cast a slur upon the gospel scheme of mora-  
 lity. And on the other hand he cries up his own theory of  
 morals, as representing *Virtue in all her engaging charms*. That  
 “ nothing appears but gentleness, humanity, beneficence, affa-  
 “ bility, nay even at proper intervals, play, frolic, and gaiety.  
 “ She talks not of useless austerities and rigours, sufferance and  
 “ self-denial, &c. †.” A scheme of morals which includeth *play,*  
*frolic, and gaiety*, and has nothing to do with *self-denial, mor-*  
*tification, and sufferance*, will no doubt be very agreeable to  
 many in this gay and frolicsome age. But let us examine more  
 distinctly what ground there is for our author’s censures, as far  
 as the Christian morals are concerned.

To begin with that which he seemeth to have a particular aver-  
 sion to, *self-denial*. This is certainly what our Saviour expressly  
 requireth of those who would approve themselves his faithful  
 disciples. He insisteth upon it, as an essential condition of their  
 discipleship, that they should deny themselves—Mat. xvi. 24.  
 Mark viii. 34. And if we do not suffer ourselves to be frighten-  
 ed by the mere sound of words, but consider what is really in-  
 tended, this is one of the most useful lessons of morality, and a  
 necessary ingredient in a truly excellent and virtuous character.  
 One thing intended in this self-denial is the restraining and go-

\* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 174: † Ibid. p. 183.

verning our appetites and passions, and keeping them within proper bounds, and in a due subjection to the higher powers of reason and conscience: and this is certainly an important part of self-government and discipline, and is undoubtedly a noble attainment, and which argueth a true greatness of soul. And however difficult or disagreeable it may at first be to the animal part of our natures, it is really necessary to our happiness, and layeth the best foundation for a solid tranquillity and satisfaction of mind. Again, if we take self-denial for a readiness to deny our private interest and advantage for valuable and excellent ends, for the honour of God, or the public good, for promoting the happiness of others, or our own eternal salvation, and for serving the cause of truth and righteousness in the world; in this view nothing can be more noble and praise-worthy. And indeed whoever considers that an inordinate selfishness, and addictedness to a narrow fleshly interest, and the gratification of the carnal appetites and passions, is the source of the chief disorders of human life, will be apt to look upon self-denial to be of great consequence to morals. Without some degree of self-denial, nothing truly great, noble, or generous is to be achieved or attained. He that cannot bear to deny himself upon proper occasions, will never be of any great use either to himself or to others, nor can make any progress in the most virtuous and excellent endowments, or even in agreeable qualities, and true politeness. This writer himself, speaking of *the love of fame*, which, he tells us, rules in all generous minds, observes, that as this prevaileth, *the animal conveniences sink gradually in their value*\*. And elsewhere, in the person of the Stoic philosopher, he saith, that “we must often make such important sacrifices, as those of life and fortune, to virtue:” And that “the man of virtue looks down with contempt on all the allurements of pleasure, and all the menaces of danger—toils, dangers, and death itself carry their charms, when we brave them for the public good †.” And even after having told us, that virtue talks not of sufferance and self-denial, he adds, that “virtue never willingly parts with any pleasure, but in hope of ample compensation in some other

\* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 188.

† See the 19th of his Moral and Political Essays, p. 213.

“ period of their lives. The sole trouble she demands is of a just calculation, and a steady preference of the greater happiness\*.” Here he allows, that virtue may reasonably part with present pleasure, in hope of an ample compensation in some other period of our lives, when upon a just calculation it contributes to our greater happiness. But then he seems to confine the hope of the compensation which virtue is to look for, to some future period of this present life, which, considering the shortness and uncertainty of it, is little to be depended on, and may perhaps be thought not a sufficient foundation for a man’s denying himself present pleasures and advantages. But the gospel proposeth a much more noble and powerful consideration, *viz.* the securing a future everlasting happiness; and supposing the certainty of this, of which we have the fullest assurance given us, nothing can be more agreeable to all the rules of reason and just calculation, than to part with present pleasure, or to undergo present hardships, to obtain it.

What hath been offered with regard to the important duty of self-denial may help us to form a just notion of *mortification*, which is nearly connected with it, and which our author also findeth great fault with. The chief thing intended by it is the subduing our fleshly appetites, and our vicious and irregular inclinations and desires. To this purpose it is required of us, that we *mortify the deeds of the body*, Rom. viii. 13. that we *mortify our members that are on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry*, Col. iii. 5.; and that we *crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts*, Gal. v. 24. Mortification taken in this view is a noble act of virtue, and absolutely necessary to maintain the dominion of the spirit over the flesh, the superiority of reason over the inferior appetites. Where these prevail, they tend to *stupify the understanding, and harden the heart*, and hinder a man from being a *valuable member of society*, which is what Mr. Hume most unjustly chargeth upon that mortification and self-denial which is required in the gospel. Mortification is properly opposed to that indulging and pampering the flesh, which tendeth to nourish and strengthen those appetites and lusts, which it is the part

\* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 188.

of a wise and virtuous man to correct and subdue. Even fasting upon proper seasons and occasions, however ridiculed by Mr. Hume and others, may answer a very valuable end, and make a useful part of self-discipline. It may tend both to the health of the body, and to keep the mind more clean and vigorous, as well as, when accompanied with prayer, promote a true spirit of devotion. But in this as in every thing else, the Christian religion, considered in its original purity as laid down in the New Testament, preserveth a most wise moderation, and is far from carrying things to extremes, as superstition hath often done. It doth not any-where insist upon excessive, or what our author calls useless rigours and austerities. And so far is that mortification which the Gospel prescribeth, and which is nothing more than the keeping the body under a just discipline, and in a due subjection to the law of the mind, from being inconsistent with the true pleasure and satisfaction of life, that it layeth the most solid foundation for it. Mr. Hume himself takes notice of the “*supreme joy* which is to be found in the victories over vice, “when men are taught to govern their passions, to reform their vices, and subdue their worst enemies, which inhabit within their own bosoms\*.”

Not only does this gentleman find fault with self-denial and mortification, but with *sufferance*. Virtue, according to his representation of it, *talks not of sufferance and self-denial*. And yet certain it is, that among the best moralists of all ages it has been accounted one of the principal offices of virtue, to support us with a steady fortitude under all the evils that befall us in this present state, and enable us patiently and even cheerfully to bear them. A virtue that cannot suffer adversity, nor bear us up under it with dignity, and in a proper manner, is of little value in a world where we are exposed to such a variety of troubles and sorrows. And in this the Gospel morality is infinitely superior to that of the most admired pagan philosophers. Mr. Hume has reckoned among virtues “an undisturbed philosophical tranquillity, superior to pain, sorrow, anxiety, and each assault of adverse fortune †.” But what is this philosophical

\* Moral and Political Essays, p. 213.

† Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 152.

tranquillity, so much boasted of, relying only upon itself, compared with that which ariseth from the consolations set before us in the gospel, from the assurances of divine assistances and supports, from the love of God and sense of his favour, from the lively animating hopes of glory, and the eternal rewards which shall crown our patience, and persevering continuance in well-doing?

The last thing I shall take notice of, as represented under a disadvantageous character by Mr. Hume, though highly commended and insisted on by our Saviour, is *humility*: and this rightly understood is one of the most amiable virtues, and greatest ornaments of the human nature. Our author is pleased to talk of a *certain degree of pride and self-valuation*, the want of which is *a vice*, and the opposite to which is *meanness*\*. But to call a proper generosity of mind, which is above a mean or base thing, *pride*, is an abuse of words, which ought not to be admitted, if we would speak with exactness, in an inquiry concerning morals. It is to give the name of an odious vice to a very worthy disposition of soul. The gospel humility is a very different thing from meanness. It is very consistent with such a just self-valuation, as raiseth us above every thing false, mean, base, and impure, and keepeth us from doing any thing unbecoming the dignity of the reasonable nature, and the glorious character and privileges we are invested with as Christians. True humility doth not absolutely exclude all sense of our own good qualities and attainments; but it tempers the sense we have of them with a just conviction of our absolute dependance upon God for every good thing we are possessed of, and of our manifold sins, infirmities, and defects. It is opposed to a vain-glorious boasting and self-sufficiency, and to such a high conceit of our abilities and merits, as puffeth us up with a presumptuous confidence in ourselves, and contempt of others, and which is indeed one of the greatest hinderances to our progress in the most excellent and worthy attainments. It manifesteth itself towards God, by an entire unreserved subjection and resignation to his authority and will, by proper acknowledgments of our own unworthiness before him, and a sense of our continual dependance upon him, and constant

\* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 146, 147.

need of his gracious assistance. And it expresseth itself towards men, by causing us to yield a due submission to our superiors, and to be affable and condescending to our inferiors, courteous and obliging towards our equals, in honour preferring one another, as St. Paul expresseth it, and ready to bear with each other's weaknesses and absurdities. In a word, it diffuseth its kindly influence through the whole of our deportment, and all the offices of life. Nothing is so hateful as pride and arrogance. And true humility is so amiable, so engaging, so necessary to render a person agreeable, that no man can hope to please, who hath not at least the appearance of it. Our author himself observes, that "among well-bred people, a mutual deference is affected, contempt of others disguised\*:" and that "as we are naturally proud and selfish, and apt to assume the preference above others, a polite man is taught to behave with deference towards those he converses with, and to yield the superiority to them in all the common occurrences of society†." So that, according to him, a shew of humility and preferring others to ourselves, is a necessary part of good behaviour; and yet he is pleased to reckon humility among those things that neither render a man a more valuable member of society, nor qualify him for the entertainment of company, but on the contrary cross those desirable purposes, and harden the heart, and sour the temper.

But enough of Mr. Hume; who, if we may judge of him by his writings, will scarce be charged with the fault of having carried humility to an excess. A pity it is that he hath not made a better use of his abilities and talents, which might have laid a just foundation for acquiring the praise he seems so fond of, as well as rendered him really useful to the world, if he had been as industrious to employ them in serving and promoting the excellent cause of religion, as he hath unhappily been in endeavouring to weaken and expose it!

\* Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 162, 162.

† Moral and political Essays, p. 184, 185.

## POSTSCRIPT.

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**A**FTER great part of this work was finished, and sent to the press, I met with a book, which I have read with great pleasure, intitled, *The Criterion; or, Miracles examined, with a View to expose the Pretensions of Pagans and Papists; to compare the miraculous Powers recorded in the New Testament, with those said to subsist in latter Times; and to shew the great and material Difference between them in point of Evidence: from whence it will appear, that the former must be true, and the latter may be false.* The subject is evidently both curious and important, and is treated by the author, who, I hear, is the Rev. Mr. Douglass, in a judicious and masterly way. It was published at London in 1754, and therefore before the publication of the second volume of the *View of the Deistical Writers*. And if I had then seen it, I should certainly have thought myself obliged to take particular notice of it. The worthy author has made judicious observations upon Mr. Hume's *Essay on Miracles*, especially that part of it which relateth to the miracles ascribed to the Abbé de Paris, which he has insisted on for an hundred pages together. And it is no small satisfaction to me, that there is a perfect harmony between what this learned author has written on this subject, and what I have published in the preceding part of this work, though neither of us knew of the other's work. He shews, as I have endeavoured to do, that fraud and imposture were plainly detected in several instances: and that where the facts were true, natural causes sufficient to produce the effect may be assigned, without supposing any thing miraculous in the case. This he has particularly shewn, with regard to each of the miracles insisted on by Mr. de Montgeron, which he accounts for much in the same way that Mr. des Voeux hath more largely done, though he had not seen that gentleman's valuable writings, to which I have frequently referred for a fuller account of those things, which I could do little more than hint



at. The reader will find in Mr. Douglass's work a full proof of the wonderful force of the imagination, and the mighty influence that strong impressions made upon the mind, and vehement passions raised there, may have in producing surprizing changes on the body, and particularly in removing diseases: of which he hath produced several well-attested instances, no less extraordinary than those attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and which yet cannot reasonably be pretended to be properly miraculous.

As I have thought myself obliged to take notice of that part of this gentleman's book, which hath so near a connection with the work in which I have been engaged; so it is but just to observe, that it is also, with regard to every other part of it, a learned and accurate performance.

What he proposes to shew is, that the evidence for the gospel facts is as extraordinary as the facts themselves; and that no just suspicion of fraud or falsehood appeareth in the accounts; while every thing is the reverse, with regard to the evidence brought for the pagan or popish miracles.

He observes, that the extraordinary facts ascribed to a miraculous interposition among the Pagans of old, or the Christians of latter times, are all reducible to these two classes. The accounts are either such as, from the circumstances thereof, appear to be false; or, the facts are such as, by the nature thereof, they do not appear to be miraculous. As to the first, the general rules he lays down, by which we may try the pretended miracles amongst Pagans and Papists, and which may set forth the grounds on which we suppose them to be false, are these three: That either they were not published to the world till long after the time when they were said to be performed: Or, they were not published in the places where it is pretended the facts were wrought, but were propagated only at a great distance from the scene of action: Or, they were suffered to pass without due examination, because they coincided with the favourite opinions and prejudices of those to whom they were reported; or, because the accounts were encouraged and supported by those who alone had the power of detecting the fraud, and could prevent any examination, which might tend to undeceive the world. These observations he applies to the pagan and popish miracles; some of the most remarkable of which he distinctly mentions, and shews, that there  
are

are none of them that do not labour under one or other of these defects.

After considering those pretended miracles, which, from the circumstances of the accounts given of them, appear to be false, he next proceedeth to those works, which, though they may be true, and ascribed by ignorance, art, or credulity, to supernatural causes, yet are really natural, and may be accounted for, without supposing any miraculous interposition; and here he enters on a large and particular discussion of the miracles attributed to the Abbé de Paris, and of some other miracles that have been much boasted of in the Romish church.

Having fully examined and exposed the pagan and popish miracles, he next proceeds to shew, that the objections made against them, and which administer just grounds of suspicion, cannot be urged against the gospel miracles. And here he distinctly shews, First, that the facts were such that, from the nature of them, they must needs be miraculous, and cannot be accounted for in a natural way, or by any power of imagination, or strong impressions made upon the mind; and, Secondly, that those facts are such as, from the circumstances of them, they cannot be false. And to this purpose, he makes it appear, that they were published and appealed to at the time when they were performed, and were coeval with the preaching of Christianity, which was manifestly founded upon them. They were also published and attested at the places where the scene of them was laid, and on the spot on which they were wrought: and the circumstances, under which they were first published, give us an assurance, that they underwent a strict examination, and consequently that they could not have escaped detection, had they been impostures.

Mr. Douglass thinks it not sufficient barely to prove, that the testimony for the gospel-miracles is stronger than that which supporteth any other pretended miracles; he further shews, by a variety of considerations, that it is the strongest that can be supposed, or that from the nature of the thing could be had. And then he proceeds to observe, that, besides the unexceptionable proof from testimony, the credibility of the gospel-miracles is confirmed to us, by collateral evidences of the most striking nature, and which no spurious miracles can boast of: Such as, the great change that was thereby introduced into the state of religion:

the proofs that God was with the first publishers of Christianity, in other instances besides those of miracles, particularly in assisting them supernaturally in the knowledge of the scheme of religion which they taught, and of which they were not capable of being the authors or inventors, and enabling them to give clear predictions of future events. And particularly he insisteth upon that most express and circumstantial prediction of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, as a demonstration that Jesus acted under a supernatural influence. The last thing he urgeth as a collateral evidence is, that the miracles recorded in Scripture were performed by those who assumed the character of prophets, or teachers sent from God, and their miracles were intended as credentials to establish their claim, to add authority to the messages they delivered, and the laws they taught — A character which, he shews, both the pagan and popish miracles are entirely destitute of. }

This is a brief account of the plan of Mr. Douglass's work, which fully answereth the title: and it is with great pleasure I take this opportunity to acknowledge the merit of the learned author, and the service he hath done to the Christian and Protestant cause.

I am, Sir, &c.

## L E T T E R XXII.

*Lord Bolingbroke's Posthumous Works an insolent Attempt upon Religion, natural and revealed—Not written according to the Laws of Method—His fair Professions, and the advantageous Account he gives of his own Design—He exalteth himself above all that have written before him, Ancients and Moderns; blames the Free-thinkers for taking unbecoming Liberties; yet writes himself without any Regard to the Rules of Decency—His outrageous Invectives against the Holy Scriptures, particularly the Writings of Moses and St. Paul—The severe Censures he passeth on the most celebrated Heathen Philosophers—But, above all, the virulent and contemptuous Reproaches he casteth upon Christian Philosophers and Divines—A general Account of his Scheme, and the main Principles to which it is reducible,*

SIR,

**T**HE account you gave me of the late pompous edition of the works of the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke in five large volumes 4to. made me very desirous to see them. But it was some time after the publication of them, before I had an opportunity of gratifying my curiosity. I have now read them with some care and attention.

The works he had published in his own life-time, and which are republished in this edition, had created a high opinion of the genius and abilities of the author. In them he had treated chiefly concerning matters of a political nature; and it were greatly to be wished for his own reputation, and for the benefit of mankind, that he had confined himself to subjects of that kind, in that part of his works which he designed to be published after his decease. These his posthumous works make by far the greater part of this collection. His *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, which were published before the rest, had prepared the world not to look for any thing from him, that was friendly to Christianity or the holy Scriptures. But I am apt to think, that the extreme insolence, the virulence and contempt with which in his other

posthumous works he hath treated those things that have been hitherto accounted most sacred among Christians, and the open attacks he hath made upon some important principles of natural religion itself, have exceeded whatever was expected or imagined. There is ground to apprehend, that the quality and reputation of the author, his high pretensions to reason and freedom of thought, his great command of words, and the positive and dictatorial air he every-where assumes, may be apt to impose upon many readers, and may do mischief in an age too well prepared already for receiving such impressions. Upon these considerations, you have been pleased to think, that a distinct examination of this writer might help to furnish a very proper supplement to the view which hath been taken of the deistical writers of the last and present century. I was, I must confess, not very fond of the employment: ~~for~~ what pleasure could be proposed in raking into such a heap of materials, which are thrown together without much order, and among which one is sure to meet with many things shocking to any man that has a just veneration for our holy religion, and who hath its honour and interests really at heart?

Before I enter on a distinct consideration of what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered both against natural and revealed religion, I shall make some general observations on his spirit and design, and his manner of treating the subjects he has undertaken, which may help us to form a judgment of his character as a writer, and how far he is to be depended upon.

The manner of writing his Lordship hath generally chosen is by way of essay. He has been far from confining himself to the laws of method; and perhaps thought it beneath so great a genius to stoop to common rules. But there is certainly a medium between being too stiff and pedantic, and too loose and negligent. He is sensible that he has not been very methodical, and seems to please himself in it. He declares, that "he does not observe in these Essays, any more than he used to do in conversation, a just proportion in the members of his discourse\*:" and that he has thrown his reflections upon paper as they "occurred to his thoughts, and as the frequent interruptions to which he

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 460.

“ was exposed would give him leave\*.” He condescends to make a kind of apology for this way of writing, when he says, “ I will endeavour not to be tedious; and this endeavour will succeed the better perhaps by declining any over-strict observation of method †.” But I am apt to think he would have been less tedious, and more enlightening to his reader, if he had been more observant of the rules of method. He might then have avoided many of those repetitions and digressions, which so frequently recur in these Essays, and which, notwithstanding all the advantages of his style, and the vivacity of his imagination, often prove, if I may judge of others by myself, very disagreeable and irksome to the reader.

As to his design in these writings, if we are to take his own word for it, very great advantage might be expected from them to mankind. He believes “ few men have consulted others, both the living and the dead, with less precipitation, and in a greater spirit of docility, than he has done: He distrusted himself, not his teachers, men of the greatest name, ancient and modern. But he found at last, that it was safer to trust himself than them, and to proceed by the light of his own understanding, than to wander after those *ignes fatui* of philosophy ‡.” He is sensible that “ it is the modest, not the presumptuous inquirer, who makes a real and safe progress in the discovery of divine truth §; and that “ candour and knowledge are qualifications which should always go together, and are inseparable from the love of truth, and promote one another in the discovery of it ||.” He contents himself to be “ governed by the dictates of nature, and “ is therefore in no danger of becoming atheistical, superstitious, or sceptical\*\*.”

In his introduction to his Essays, in a letter to Mr. Pope, he gives a most pompous account of his intentions, and evidently raises himself above the greatest men, ancient and modern. He represents metaphysical divines and philosophers, as having bewildered themselves, and a great part of mankind, in such intricate labyrinths of hypothetical reasonings, that few can find

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 556.

† Ibid. p. 320.

‡ Ibid. p. 492.

† Ibid. p. 318.

§ Ibid. p. 344.

\*\* Ibid. vol. v. p. 492.

“ their

“ their way back, and none can find it forward into the road of truth\*.” He declares that “ natural theology, and natural religion, have been corrupted to such a degree, that it is grown, and was long since, as necessary to plead the cause of God against the divine as against the atheist; to assert his existence against the latter, to defend his attributes against the former, and to justify his providence against both †.” That “ truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, revelations of the Creator, inventions of the creature, dictates of reason, sallies of enthusiasm, have been blended so long together in systems of theology, that it may be thought dangerous to separate them ‡.” And he seems to think this was a task reserved for him. He proposes “ to distinguish genuine and pure theism from the prophane mixtures of human imagination; and to go to the root of that error which encourages our curiosity, sustains our pride, fortifies our prejudices, and gives pretence to delusion; to discover the true nature of human knowledge, how far it extends, how far it is real, and where and how it begins to be fantastical §;” “ that the gaudy visions of error being dispelled, men may be accustomed to the simplicity of truth.” For this he expects to be “ treated with scorn and contempt by the whole theological and metaphysical tribe, and railed at as an infidel ||.” But “ laying aside all the immense volumes of fathers and councils, schoolmen, casuists, and controversial writers, he is determined to seek for genuine Christianity with that simplicity of spirit with which it is taught in the gospel by Christ himself\*\*.” The guides he proposes to follow are, “ the works and the word of God ††.” And he declares, that “ for himself he thought it much better not to write at all, than to write under any restraint from delivering the whole truth of things as it appeared to him †††.”

But though he thus professes an impartial love of truth, and to deliver his sentiments with freedom, yet he seems resolved, where he happens to differ from the received opinion, not to shew a decent regard to the established religion of his country. He praiseth

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 327.

† Ibid. p. 331.

‡ Ibid. p. 330.

†† Ibid. p. 347.

† Ibid. p. 327, 328.

§ Ibid. p. 328.

\*\* Ibid. p. 339.

†† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 54.

Scævola and Varro, who, he says, “both thought that things “evidently false might deserve an outward respect, when they “are interwoven with a system of government. This outward “respect every good subject will shew them in such a case. He “will not propagate those errors, but he will be cautious how he “propagates even truth in opposition to them\*.” He blames not only that arbitrary *tyrannical spirit* that puts on the *mask of religious zeal*, but that *presumptuous factious spirit* that has appeared under the *mask of liberty*; and which, if it should prevail, would destroy at once the general influence of religion, by shaking the foundations of it which education had laid. But he thinks, “there is a middle way between these extremes, in which a reasonable man and a good citizen may direct his steps †.” It is to be presumed therefore, that he would have it thought that this is the way he himself hath taken. He mentions with approbation the maxims of the Soufys, a sect of philosophers in Persia: one of which is: “If you find no reason to doubt concerning the opinions of your fathers, keep to them, they will be sufficient for you. If you find any reason to doubt concerning them, seek the truth quietly, but take care not to disturb the minds of other men.” He professeth to proceed by these rules, and blameth some who are called Free-thinkers for imagining, that as every man has a right to think and judge for himself, he has therefore a right of speaking according to the full freedom of his thoughts. The freedom belongs to him as a rational creature: He lies under the restraint as a member of society ‡.”

But notwithstanding these fair professions, perhaps there scarce ever was an author who had less regard to the rules of decency in writing than Lord Bolingbroke. The holy Scriptures are received with great veneration among Christians; and the religion there taught is the religion publicly professed and established in these nations; and therefore, according to his own rule, ought to be treated with a proper respect. And yet on many occasions he throws out the most outrageous abuse against those sacred writings, and the authors of them. He compares the history of the Pentateuch to the romances Don Quixote was so fond of;

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 331.

† Ibid. p. 332.

‡ Ibid. p. 333, 334.



and pronounces that they who receive them as authentic are not much less mad than he\*. That "it is no less than blasphemy to assert the Jewish Scriptures to have been divinely inspired;" and he represents those that attempt to justify them as having "ill hearts as well as heads, and as worse than atheists, though they may pass for saints †." He chargeth those with impiety, "who would impose on us, as the word of God, a book which contains scarce any thing that is not repugnant to the wisdom, power, and other attributes of a Supreme All-perfect Being ‡." And he roundly pronounceth, that "there are gross defects and palpable falsehoods in almost every page of the Scriptures, and the whole tenor of them is such, as no man, who acknowledges a Supreme All-perfect Being, can believe to be his word §." This is a brief specimen of his invectives against the sacred writings of the Old Testament, and which he repeateth on many occasions. He affecteth indeed to speak with seeming respect of Christianity, yet he has not only endeavoured to invalidate the evidences that are brought to support it, but he passeth the severest censures upon doctrines which he himself representeth as original and essential doctrines of the Christian religion. He makes the most injurious representation of the doctrine of our redemption by the blood of Christ, and chargeth it as repugnant to all our ideas of order, of justice, of goodness, and even of theism ||. And after a most virulent invective against the Jewish notion of God, as partial, cruel, arbitrary, and unjust, he asserts, that the character imputed to him by the Christian doctrine of redemption, and future punishments, is as bad or worse \*\*. Great is the contempt and reproach he hath poured forth upon St. Paul, who was the penman of a considerable part of the New Testament, and whose name and writings have been always deservedly had in great veneration in the Christian church. He chargeth him with dissimulation and falsehood, and even with madness ††. He asserts that his gospel was different from that of Christ, and contradictory to it ††; that he writes confusedly, obscurely, and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol iii. p. 280.

† Ibid. p. 308.

|| Ibid. vol. iv. p. 318. vol. v. p. 291. 532.

†† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 172. 306.

† Ibid. p. 299. 306.

§ Ibid. p. 298.

\*\* Ibid. p. 532, 533.

†† Ibid. p. 313. 327, 328.

unintelligibly;

unintelligibly;—and where his gospel is intelligible, it is often absurd, profane, and trifling\*.

Some of those gentlemen who have shewn little respect for the holy Scriptures, have yet spoke with admiration of many of the fages of antiquity: but Lord Bolingbroke has on all occasions treated the greatest men of all ages with the utmost contempt and scorn. It is allowable indeed for sincere and impartial inquirers after truth, to differ from persons of high reputation for knowledge and learning, ancient and modern: and sometimes it is the more necessary to point out their errors, lest the authority of great names should lead men aside from truth. But whilst we think ourselves obliged to detect their mistakes, there is a decent regard to be paid them: it would be wrong to treat them in a reproachful and contemptuous manner. Yet this is what our author hath done. If all the passages were laid together, in which he hath inveighed against the wisest and most learned men of all ages, especially the philosophers, metaphysicians, and divines, they would fill no small volume. And indeed these kind of declamatory invectives recur so often in these Essays, as cannot but create great disgust to every reader of taste. I shall mention a few passages out of a multitude that might be produced, and which may serve as a sample of the rest. He saith of the philosophers, that “they seem to acquire knowledge only as a necessary step to error, and grow so fond of the latter, that they esteem it no longer human, but raise it by an imaginary apotheosis up to a divine science: That these searchers after truth, these lovers of wisdom, are nothing better than venders of false wares: And the most irrational of all proceedings pass for the utmost efforts of human reason †.” He represents metaphysical divines and philosophers as having “wandered many thousand years in imaginary light and darkness ‡.” He frequently chargeth them with *madness*, and sometimes with *blasphemy*; and that they “staggered about, and jostled one another in their dreams §.” Speaking of Plato and Aristotle, he says, “their works have been preserved, perhaps more to the detriment than to the advancement of learning ||.” And though he sometimes

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 330, 331. † Ibid. vol. iii. p. 490.  
 ‡ Ibid. vol. iv. p. 8. § Ibid. vol. iii. p. 553, 554. vol. iv. p. 129. 150.  
 || Ibid. vol. iii. p. 392.

commends Socrates, he pronounces, that he “ substituted fantastical ideas instead of real knowledge, and corrupted science “ to the very source:” That “ he lost himself in the clouds— “ when he declared, that the two offices of philosophy are, the “ contemplation of God, and the abstracting of the soul from “ corporeal sense:” And that he and Plato were mad enough to think themselves capable of such contemplation and such abstraction\*. Besides many occasional passages scattered throughout these Essays, there are several large sections which contain almost nothing else than invectives against Plato and his philosophy. He says, that philosopher “ treated every subject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombast poet, and a mad theologian †:” That “ he who reads Plato’s works like a man in his senses, will be tempted to think on many occasions that the “ author was not so:” And that “ no man ever dreamed so wildly as this author wrote ‡.” He chargeth him with a “ false “ sublime in style, and that no writer can sink lower than he “ into a tedious Socratical irony, into certain flimsy hypothetical “ reasonings that prove nothing, and into allusions that are mere “ vulgarisms, and that neither explain nor enforce any thing “ that wants to be explained or enforced §.” He represents all the commentators and translators of Plato as *dull or mad*; and calls Ficinus *delirious*, and Dacier *simple* and a *bigot*, and a *Platonic madman* ||. The true reason of the particular dislike he every-where expresses against that philosopher seems to be what he calls his “ rambling speculations about the divine and “ spiritual nature, about immaterial substances, about the immortality of the soul, and about the rewards and punishments of a “ future state \*\*.”

As to the Stoics, he declares, “ that their theology and morality “ were alike absurd:” That, in endeavouring to account how it came that there is evil in the world, and that the best men have often the greatest share of this evil, “ they talked mere nonsense, “ figurative, sublime, metaphysical, but nonsense still ††.” The ancient *theists* in general he represents as having been seduced

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 113.

† Ibid. p. 344. 357.

‡ Ibid. p. 107. 140. 355.

†† Ibid. vol. v. p. 247. 317.

† Ibid. p. 129.

§ Ibid. p. 140, 141. 353, 354.

\*\* Ibid. p. 347, 348.

many

many ways into a confederacy with the atheists, and particularly blames them for pretending to connect moral attributes, such as we conceive them, with the physical attributes of God; which, he affirms, gave great advantage to the objections of the atheists\*.

But there is no sort of men against whom he inveighs with greater licence of reproach than the Christian divines and philosophers. He frequently speaks of the ancient fathers with the utmost contempt: That they were superstitious, credulous, lying men;—and that “the greatest of them were unfit to write “or speak on any subject that required closeness of reasoning, “an evangelical candour, and even common ingenuoufness †.” As to the more modern divines, he takes every occasion of insulting and abusing them. Not only doth he represent them as “declaimers who have little respect for their readers,—as hired “to defend the Christian system,—and as seeking nothing more “than the honour of the gown, by having the last word in every “dispute ‡;” but he says, “they talk a great deal of blasphemy “on the head of internal divine characters of Scripture §.” He often repeats it, that *atheists deny God*, but the *divines defame him*, which, he thinks, is the *worse of the two*. He charges them with *madness*, and *worse than madness* ||: That “they have “recourse to trifling distinctions, and dogmatical affirmations, “the last retrenchments of obstinacy \*\*:” That “of all fools, the “most presumptuous, and at the same time most trifling, are “metaphysical philosophers and divines ††.” He charges them, in an address he makes to God, with “owning his existence only “to censure his works, and the dispensations of his providence †††.” And frequently represents them as in *alliance with the atheists*, as *betraying the cause of God* to them, and as doing *their best, in concert with these their allies*, to destroy both the *goodness* and *justice* of God §§. He declares, that “he who follows them cannot avoid presumption and profaneness, and “must be much upon his guard to avoid blasphemy |||:” “That

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 316.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 337, 338. vol. iv. p. 586.

‡ Ibid. p. 290. vol. v. p. 286. 314.

|| Ibid. vol. iv. p. 273.

†† Ibid. p. 493.

§§ Ibid. p. 341. 346. 393, &c.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 272.

\*\* Ibid. vol. v. p. 288.

†† Ibid. p. 339.

||| Ibid. p. 464.

“ the preachers of natural and revealed religion have been loudest  
 “ in their clamours against Providence, and have done nothing  
 “ more than repeat what the atheists have said; — and that they  
 “ attempt to prove that the Supreme Being is the tyrant of the  
 “ world he governs\*.” And the same charge he advanceth  
 against the Christian philosophers in general.

But besides these general investives against Christian philosophers and divines, he hath particularly attacked some of the most celebrated names in a manner little reconcileable to good manners, and the decency which ought to be observed towards persons of distinguished reputation, even when we think them in the wrong. Speaking of “ many reverend persons, who,” he says, “ have had their heads turned by a preternatural fermentation  
 “ of the brain, or a philosophical delirium,” — he observes, that  
 “ none has been more so than Dr. Cudworth. — He read too  
 “ much to think enough.” He represents him as having “ given  
 “ a nonsensical paraphrase of nonsense;” — and that “ the good  
 “ man passed his life in the study of an unmeaning jargon: and  
 “ as he learned, so he taught †.” He charges Bishop Cumberland with “ metaphysical jargon, and theological blasphemy ‡.” Stillingsfleet is spoken of with contempt; as also Huet, Bochart, and the Christian antiquaries §. Nor is archbishop Tillotson treated with greater regard. He talks in a very flighting way of those that have written on the law of nature, particularly Grotius, Selden, and Puffendorf: That they “ puzzle and perplex the  
 “ plainest thing in the world, and seem to be great writers on  
 “ this subject, by much the same right as he might be called a  
 “ great traveller, who should go from London to Paris by the  
 “ Cape of Good Hope ||.” There is none of the Christian philosophers of whom he speaks with so much respect as Mr. Locke; yet he represents him as having “ dreamed that he had a power  
 “ of forming abstract ideas;” and mentions this as a proof, that  
 “ there is such a thing as a philosophical delirium\*\*.” And he charges it upon him as a great inconsistency, that he should write a Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistles, and a Discourse on the

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 484, 485.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 353. vol. iv. p. 92.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 264. vol. iv. p. 13.

\*\* Ibid. vol. ii. p. 441, 442.

‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 82.

|| Ibid. vol. v. p. 68.

Reasonableness of Christianity, after he had written an Essay on Human Understanding\*.

But there is no one person whom he treats with so much rudeness and insolence as the late eminently learned Dr. Samuel Clarke. He calls him a presumptuous dogmatist, and represents him as having “impiously advanced, that we know the rule God governs by as well as he,—and that, like another Eunomius, he presumes to know God, his moral nature at least, and to teach others to know him, as well as he knows himself †.” He chargeth him with a *foolish and wicked rhodomontade*, “with pretending to make infallible demonstrations, like the Pope’s decrees, and sending every one to the devil who does not believe in them ‡: and with a rhapsody of presumptuous reasonings, of prophane absurdities, of evasions that seem to answer while they only perplex, and in one word, the most arbitrary and least reasonable suppositions §.” He saith, that “the trenchments cast up by him are feeble beyond belief.” (That he boasts like a bully, who looks fierce, speaks big, and is little to be feared ||.) Not only does he call him an *audacious and vain sophist* \*\*, but he carries it so far as to say, that “he and Wollaston do in effect renounce God, as much as the rankest of the atheistical tribe ††. With regard to the last mentioned celebrated writer, Mr. Wollaston, besides the severe reproach cast upon him in the passage I have just cited, Lord Bolingbroke elsewhere treats him as “a licentious maker of hypotheses—and a whining philosopher.” He represents all that he hath said about the immortality of the soul “as a string of arbitrary suppositions;” and that “his discourse on that subject is such as would lead one to think, that the philosopher who held it was a patient of Dr. Monro’s not yet perfectly restored to his senses †††. He acknowledges him indeed to have been a man of *parts and learning*, but charges him with *writing nonsense*; that he, and such as he, were *learned lunatics*; and he treats his way of arguing about a future state, as a *specimen of*

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 166. 295:

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 52. vol. v. p. 449.

§ Ibid. p. 292.

\*\* Ibid. p. 293.

†† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 515. 518. vol. v. p. 388.

‡ Ibid. p. 252.

|| Ibid. p. 280. 293.

†† Ibid. p. 484, 485.

16 in man's mind...

*that sort of madness* which is called a *dementia quoad hoc*\*. The same censure he passeth on the late Lord President of Scotland, "that he was indeed a man of capacity, good sense, and knowledge, but was in a *delirium*, and *mad, quoad hoc*, when he wrote "against Tindal †."

You cannot but have observed, in reading over several of the passages which have been produced, that it is familiar with Lord Bolingbroke to represent those as mad and out of their senses who happen to differ from him, at least as mad with regard to the particular point in difference. I shall only mention one passage more to this purpose out of the many that might be produced. Having compared the reasoners *a priori* to persons in *Bedlam*, and the several sorts of madmen there, he adds, that "atheists are one sort of madmen, many divines and theists another sort;"—and that "these sorts of madmen are principally to be found in colleges and schools, where different sects have rendered this sort of madness, which is occasionally elsewhere, both epidemical and traditional ‡." If one were to imitate this author's manner of talking, one might be apt to charge him as being seized with a sort of madness, when certain subjects come in his way—metaphysics; artificial theology; Plato and Platonic philosophy; spiritual substance, and incorporeal essence; but, above all, the Christian divines and clergy. These, when he happens to meet with them, bring one of his fits upon him, and often set him a-raving for several pages together. But I confess I too much dislike such a way of writing to make recriminations of this kind. And yet his lordship tells the divines of the *discretion of their adversaries*, and would have them *return it with discretion*. And he represents the *orthodox bullies*, as he calls them, as "affecting to triumph over men, who employ but part of their strength, as tiring them with impertinent paradoxes, and provoking them with unjust reflections, and often by the foulest language §."

I am apt to think, that by this time you are weary of reading over such a heap of abusive reflections, so unbecoming any man of learning and education, much more one so conversant in the polite world as Lord Bolingbroke has been. The transcribing

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 474.

† Ibid. p. 369, 370.

‡ Ibid. p. 523.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 272, 273.

them out of his *Essays* was no very agreeable employment. But they so often occur there, and make so remarkable a part of the works of this right honourable author, that it was absolutely necessary to take some notice of them. One thing may be safely collected from his writing after this manner, *viz.* that he had a very high opinion of the superiority of his own understanding, and a sovereign contempt for all those that were in different sentiments from him, whether philosophers, ancient or modern, or divines, but especially for the latter.

If we examine what foundation there is for these high pretensions, or what new and important discoveries this writer hath made in religion or philosophy, which may be of real use to mankind, the principal things in his scheme may be reduced to the following heads:

1. That there is one Supreme All-perfect Being, the eternal and original cause of all things, of almighty power and infinite wisdom; but that we must not pretend to ascribe to him any moral attributes, distinct from his physical, especially holiness, justice, and goodness: that he has not these attributes, according to the ideas we conceive of them, nor any thing equivalent to those qualities as they are in us; and that to pretend to deduce moral obligations from those attributes, or to talk of imitating God in his moral attributes, is enthusiasm or blasphemy.

2. That God made the world, and established the laws of this system at the beginning: but that he doth not now concern himself in the affairs of men, or that if he doth, his providence only extendeth to collective bodies, but hath no regard to individuals, to their actions, or to the events that befall them.

3. That the soul is not a distinct substance from the body: that the whole man is dissolved at death: and that though it may be useful to mankind to believe the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, yet it is a fiction, which hath no real foundation in nature and reason: and that to pretend to argue for future retributions from the apprehended unequal distributions of this present state, is absurd and blasphemous, and is to cast the most unworthy reflections on divine Providence.

4. That the law of nature is what reason discovereth to us concerning our duty as founded in the human system: that it is clear and obvious to all mankind; but has been obscured and perverted



by ancient philosophers and modern divines: that it has not been set in a proper light by those who have undertaken to treat of it; and therefore he hath represented it in its genuine purity and simplicity: and that the sanctions of that law relate to men not individually, but collectively considered.

5. That from the clearness and sufficiency of the law of nature, it may be concluded, that God hath made no other revelation of his will to mankind: and that there is no need or use for any extraordinary supernatural revelation.

6. That it is profane and blasphemous to ascribe the Jewish Scriptures to revelation or inspiration from God: that the history contained there is false and incredible, and the scheme of religion taught in those writings is absolutely unworthy of God, and repugnant to his divine perfections.

7. That the New Testament consists of two different gospels, opposite to one another, that of Christ and that of St. Paul: that Christianity in its genuine simplicity, as taught by Jesus Christ, and contained in the evangelical writings, is a benevolent institution, and may be regarded as a republication of the law of nature, or rather of the theology of Plato: that the morals it teaches are pure, but no other than the philosophers had taught before, and that some of its precepts are not agreeable to the natural law; and some of its original doctrines, particularly those relating to the redemption of mankind by the death of Christ, and to future rewards and punishments, are absurd, and inconsistent with the attributes of God.

These appear to me to be the most remarkable things in the late Lord Bolingbroke's *Posthumous Works*, as far as natural and revealed religion is concerned. And the method I propose to pursue in my observations upon them is this:

I shall first consider the attempts he hath made to subvert the main principles that lie at the foundation of all religion, *viz.* those relating to the moral attributes of God, a particular providence extending to the individuals of the human race, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions. I shall next examine the account he hath given of the law of nature, and of the duties and sanctions of that law. After which it will be proper to consider what he hath offered concerning divine revelation in general, with a view to shew that an extraordinary revelation

lation of the will of God to mankind is absolutely needless, and that therefore we may conclude, that God hath never given such a revelation at all. I shall proceed, in the next place, to a particular and distinct examination of the objections he hath urged against the truth and divine original of the Mosaic revelation, and the Scriptures of the Old Testament; and shall conclude with considering what more directly relateth to the Christian revelation properly so called, to its proofs and evidences, and to its laws and doctrines, all which he hath endeavoured to expose.

This I hope may be sufficient to answer the design I have in view, which is to obviate the principal mischiefs to religion, which Lord Bolingbroke's Works seem fitted to produce. Other things there are in these volumes, which might furnish matter for many reflections, but which I shall take little or no notice of, as they do not come within the compass of the plan I propose.

I am, &c,

## L E T T E R    X X I I I .

*Lord Bolingbroke asserts the Existence of God against the Atheists, but rejects the Argument a priori, and that drawn from the general Consent of Mankind—He is for reducing all the divine Attributes to Wisdom and Power, and blames the Divines for distinguishing between the physical and moral Attributes—He asserts, that we cannot ascribe Goodness and Justice to God, according to our Ideas of them, nor argue with any Certainty about them—That it is absurd to deduce moral Obligations from the moral Attributes of God, or to pretend to imitate him in those Attributes—Observations upon his Scheme—It is shewn, that the moral Attributes are necessarily included in the Idea of the absolutely perfect Being—The Author's Objections against ascribing those Attributes to God, or distinguishing them from his physical Attributes, particularly considered—His manifold Inconsistencies and Contradictions.*

S I R,

**I**N my last a general account was given of the scheme Lord Bolingbroke seems to have had in view in his Posthumous Works, and of the main principles to which it is reducible. I now proceed to a more distinct examination of those principles; and shall begin with that which lieth at the foundation of all religion, the existence and attributes of God. And it must be acknowledged, that his Lordship every-where in the strongest terms asserteth the existence of the one Supreme All-perfect Being, the Great Author of the universe. He represents this as *strictly demonstrable*, and treats the opinion of the atheists as *infinitely absurd*; and that they can *only cavil*, but *cannot reason*, against the existence of the first cause; of which, he thinks, we may be in reason as sure as of our own existence. There are several passages in his works, in which he expresseth himself devoutly with regard to the Supreme Being, and professeth seriously to adore him. And there are some instances of his addressing him with great solemnity, and in a religious manner\*.

\* See particularly vol. iii. p. 247. 358. vol. v. p. 338, &amp;c.

I need not take any notice of what he hath briefly offered for demonstrating the existence of a Deity\*. He has said nothing on this head, but what has been frequently urged to great advantage by others before him; and particularly by Dr. Clarke, in what his Lordship is pleased to call his *pretended demonstration of the being and attributes of God* †.

Our author indeed is for confining the proof to the argument *a posteriori*, and is for absolutely rejecting the argument *a priori*, whereas Dr. Clarke insists upon both: and I cannot help thinking that both may be highly useful; and that they are then most effectual, and come with the greatest force, when they come in aid of one another.

As Lord Bolingbroke rejects the argument *a priori* for the existence and perfections of God, so he seems not willing to allow that which is drawn from the general consent of mankind. He says, it will indeed prove, that men generally believed a God, but not that such a Being exists; and he represents it as *trifling to insist upon it* ‡. And in a letter occasioned by one of Archbishop Tillotson's sermons, vol. iii. p. 257, & seq. he finds fault with that great divine for making use of that argument, and disingenuously represents it, as if he had rested the proof of a Deity principally upon it §; which he is far from doing, though it must be acknowledged to be a consideration of great weight. He particularly blames the Archbishop for ascribing this consent to the nature of the human mind, on which God has impressed an innate idea of himself; but he owns, that afterwards he softens it by saying, that "the human mind is so disposed, that men may discover, in the due use of its faculties, that there is a God ||." And he speaks of some divines who explain it thus: that the belief of God is founded on a certain natural proportion there is between this great truth and the conceptions of the human mind. But our author thinks, that "such a *natural and intimate proportion* between the existence of God, and the conceptions of the human mind, may appear chimerical, and perhaps is so \*\*;" and observes, that "polytheism was more con-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 353, 354.

† Ibid. p. 52.

‡ Ibid. p. 247.

§ Ibid. p. 258. 267.

|| Ibid. p. 258.

\*\* Ibid. p. 259, 260.

“formable to the natural conceptions of the human mind, especially in the most ancient and ignorant ages, than the belief of One first intelligent Cause, the sole Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things.” Yet he afterwards declares, that “the idea of an All-wise and All-powerful Being, the first cause of all things, is so *proportionable to human reason*, that it must have been received into the minds of men, as soon as they began to contemplate the face of nature, and to exercise their reason in such contemplations\*.” And in his reflections on M. Maupertuis, who had slighted the argument from the general consent of mankind, he observes, that “it is general enough to shew *the proportion which this truth bears to the universal reason of mankind*†.” You cannot but observe here, that he directly makes use of that manner of expression which he had before blamed others for using.

But it will be proper more distinctly to inquire into the idea this writer gives of God, and of the divine perfections. The only attributes of God which he insisteth upon as necessary to be known by us are, his power and wisdom. “We rise,” says he, “from a knowledge of ourselves, and of the works of God, to a knowledge of his existence, and his *wisdom* and *power*, which we call infinite‡.” He blames those who presume to define the moral attributes of an All-perfect Being; and thinks “we ought to content ourselves to know that he exists by the necessity of his nature, and that his *wisdom* and *power* are infinite§.” He declares, that “a self-existent Being, the first Cause of all things, infinitely *powerful* and infinitely *wise*, is the God of natural theology: that as the whole system of the universe bears witness to this truth, so the whole system of natural religion rests on it, and requires no broader foundation. “These systems are God’s systems ||.” We see here there is no mention made of the divine goodness, as included in the idea we form of a deity. Natural theology, or natural religion, requires no broader a foundation than the acknowledging the wisdom and power of God. And so it generally is in the account our author gives of God and his attributes; as if *optimus* were not to

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 195.

‡ Ibid. p. 88.

§ Ibid. vol. v. p. 235.

† Ibid. p. 256.

|| Ibid. p. 316.

be joined with *maximus* in the deist's creed, or in the idea natural religion teaches us to form of God. And accordingly he finds fault with what he calls *artificial theology*, for pretending "to connect moral attributes, such as we conceive them, and such as they are relatively to us, with the physical attributes of God." He says, "there is no sufficient foundation for this proceeding in the phænomena of nature, and that in several cases they are repugnant." And he expressly mentions it among the wrong notions of the ancient theists, and which gave advantage to the atheists with regard to the question about the original of evil, that they maintained, that "God is just and good, and righteous, and holy, as well as powerful and wise." He blames them for saying, that "love was the first principle of things, and that it determined God to bring forth his creatures into existence\*;" and that, as Seneca says, *usque ad delicias amamur*. And elsewhere quoting a passage of Dr. Clarke, in which God is represented as having a *tender and hearty concern for the happiness of man*, he says, "these are strange words to be applied to the Supreme Being †." And he argueth at great length against those who suppose, that God made man only to be happy.

He frequently censureth the divines for distinguishing between God's physical and moral attributes: and "cannot see one religious purpose, that this distinction is necessary to answer ‡. God's moral attributes," he says, "can only be discerned in the works of God, and in the conduct of his providence: and that it is evident, they are not, cannot be so discerned in them, as to be the object of our imitation §." He represents it as great presumption to pretend to deduce our moral obligations from the moral attributes of God; and that the absurdity of this cannot be too often exposed ||. And after having asserted, that we cannot rise from our moral obligations to God's supposed moral attributes, he adds, that "he calls them *supposed*, because after all that has been supposed to prove a necessary connection between his physical and moral attributes, we may observe

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 316, 317.

† Ibid. p. 63.

‡ Ibid. p. 62.

§ Ibid. p. 63.

|| Ibid. p. 87.

“ them in his wisdom;—and that the effects of his wisdom give  
 “ us sometimes ideas of those moral qualities, which we acquire  
 “ by reflections on ourselves, and sometimes not\*.” He thinks  
 the divines are to be blamed, “ for talking of God’s infinite good-  
 “ nefs and justice, as of his infinite wisdom and power†;”  
 and observes, that “ every thing shews the wisdom and power  
 “ of God, conformably to our ideas of wisdom and power, in  
 “ the physical world and in the moral: but every thing does not  
 “ shew in like manner the justice and goodness of God, con-  
 “ formably to our ideas of those attributes in either‡.” That  
 “ though the wisdom of God does not appear alike in all the  
 “ phænomena, yet, as far as we can discover, it appears in the  
 “ greatest and least to our astonishment, and none of them can be  
 “ strained into a repugnancy to it: but the same cannot be said  
 “ of the moral attributes which we ascribe to the Supreme Being,  
 “ according to our ideas of them. It cannot be disputed, and  
 “ all sides agree, that many of the phænomena are repugnant to  
 “ our ideas of goodness and justice§.” He declares it as his  
 opinion, that “ God’s natural attributes absorb the moral||;”  
 and particularly, that “ the moral attributes of the Supreme  
 “ Being are absorbed in his wisdom; and that we should con-  
 “ sider them only as different modifications of his physical attri-  
 “ butes; and must always talk precariously and impertinently,  
 “ when we presume to apply our ideas of them to the appear-  
 “ ances of things\*\*.” And he chargeth the divines “ as pro-  
 “ ceeding in all their reasonings about the nature, moral attri-  
 “ butes, and will of God, not only without regard to the phæ-  
 “ nomena, but often in direct contradiction to them††.”

This is not a matter that he treats merely in some occasional passages. The chief design of several of his fragments and essays in his fifth volume, particularly of the fourth, seventh, fortieth, forty-first, and forty-ninth, is to argue against those who assert the moral attributes of God as distinguished from his physical: or who say, that those moral attributes, his holiness, goodness, justice, and truth, are the same in him, that they are in the ideas

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 88.

† Ibid. p. 311.

‡ Ibid. p. 313, 314.

†† Ibid. p. 310.

† Ibid. p. 528.

§ Ibid. p. 368.

\*\* Ibid. p. 335. 453.

we form of those perfections; which, he says, cannot be conceived *without manifest presumption and blasphemy*: upon this doctrine he chargeth men's *false conceptions and licentious reasonings* about the divine nature and providence. He adds, that "these *false conceptions and licentious reasonings* may proceed likewise from the *analogical doctrine*; which, though it ascribes not to God human notions, yet ascribes to him something, whatever it be, equivalent to them\*." He affirms, that "goodness and justice in God—are something transcendent, and of which we cannot make any true judgment; and that it is impossible we should argue with any certainty about them†." I shall only farther observe, that he brings a charge in this respect, not only against the Christian divines, but against the heathen philosophers. The reason he assigns, why they were "unable to propagate natural religion, and to reform mankind, is because they proceeded in Dr. Clarke's method, to argue *a priori* from the moral attributes of God, his goodness, justice, &c. which they assumed to be the same in him that they are in our ideas ‡."

By comparing these several passages together, it appears, that, according to this writer, we are unable to form any idea of the moral attributes of God: for if we cannot conceive of them according to our ideas, we cannot form any conception of them at all: that it is wrong to distinguish them from his physical attributes, or to say they are connected with those attributes: that there is not only no such thing in God as goodness or justice as we conceive of them, but nothing in him analogous or equivalent to those qualities as they are in us, or which is fitted to produce correspondent effects: that therefore it ought not to be said of God, that he is just and good, holy and true, or that he is a lover of mankind, or is concerned for our happiness, but only that he is powerful and wise: that we can only know God's moral attributes *a posteriori* from the effects, and that many of the phenomena in nature are repugnant to those attributes, and inconsistent with them: so that it is impossible for us to argue with any certainty about them. This is the plain intention

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 541.

† Ibid. p. 311. 359, 360.

‡ Ibid. p. 234.



of the passages which have been cited, and others might be produced to the same purpose; though we shall find him afterwards plainly contradicting several things which here he has advanced.

If we consider what his reason could be for setting up an hypothesis so contrary to true theism, for which yet he would be thought to have so great a zeal, there are two things which he appears to have had in view.

1. That we are in no case to deduce our moral obligations from the moral attributes of God, or to propose to imitate God in those attributes. He declares, that "the laws of nature are absurdly founded in the moral attributes of God\*;" *i. e.* it is absurd to talk of his justice, goodness, righteousness and truth, as giving rise to those laws, or appearing in the constitution of them. And as to the pretence of imitating the Deity in his moral excellencies, this is what he openly and avowedly condemns. This particularly is the design of the fourth of his fragments and essays in his fifth volume. He expressly asserts, that "God's moral attributes cannot be so discerned by us as to be the objects of our imitation †." He pronounces, that "it is absurd, and worse than absurd, to assert that man can imitate God, except in a sense so very remote, and so improper, that the expressions should never be used, much less such a duty recommended ‡." And that "those writers or preachers who exhort us to imitate God, must mean, not the God whom we see in his works, and in all that his providence orders; but the God who appears in their representations of him, and who is often such a God as no pious theist can acknowledge §." He declares for himself, that "he dares not use *theological familiarity, and talk of imitating God*; and treats that doctrine as *extravagant, false, and profane* ¶." He says, that "by assuming to imitate God, we give the strongest proof of the imperfection of our nature, whilst we neglect the real, and aspire to a mock honour, as pride, seduced by adulation, is prone to do; and as religious pride, wrought up by self-conceit into enthusiasm, does above all others\*\*." And he mentions it as an instance of the impertinence of Socrates's doctrine, that "he conjured his auditors in the prison to make

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 90. † Ibid. p. 63. ‡ Ibid. p. 62.

§ Ibid. p. 64.

¶ Ibid. p. 44. 65.

\*\* Ibid. p. 67.

“ themselves

“ themselves as like as possible to their great exemplar, the Supreme Being\*.” Thus has this dogmatical and presumptuous author taken upon him to pass a severe and insolent censure upon that which has been the doctrine of the most excellent philosophers and moralists, and of one far superior to them all, our blessed Saviour himself. See Mat. v. 45. 48. Luke iv. 35, 36. And he has particularly instanced in God’s causing his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sending rain on the just and unjust, as a proof that we cannot and ought not to aspire after an imitation of him †;” though our Lord sets this goodness of providence before us as a noble pattern, to engage us to an extensive benevolence, and that we should be ready to do good even to our enemies themselves. There are indeed depths in God’s providential dispensations, with regard to which we cannot pretend to imitate him, for want of knowing the reasons upon which he proceeds; but this does not hinder, but that we may and ought to endeavour to resemble him in his illustrious moral excellencies, as far as we can discern them in his works and in the revelations of his word, which in many instances we are able to do.

2. Another thing which he hath evidently in view, in denying that we can have any idea of the moral attributes of God, so as to make a true judgment of them, or to argue with any certainty about them, is to destroy the argument which is drawn from the consideration of these moral attributes, to shew the probability of a future state of retributions. For if God be perfectly good and just, this leads us to conclude that he will order it so, that in the final issue of things, a remarkable distinction shall be made between the righteous and the wicked; and that virtue shall upon the whole be crowned with its due reward, and vice meet with condign punishment: and since this is not uniformly done in this present state, it is reasonable to believe that there shall be a future state of rewards and punishments. This is a way of arguing, which, by his own acknowledgment, has been urged by some of the best and wisest men in all ages. To avoid this consequence, he will not allow that there is any such thing as justice and goodness in God according to our ideas, or any thing answering to what we call justice and goodness: and that it is

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iv. p. 117, 118.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 63:  
presumption

presumption in us to determine what those attributes require that God should do\*. And indeed to guard against this seems to have been a principal point with his lordship. It is for this that he denies, that providence extendeth its care to the individuals of the human race: and one of his chief prejudices against the Christian revelation appears to me to be its setting these things in so strong a light.

You easily perceive, that this part of our author's scheme is not of a trifling nature. It is not a mere speculative error, but which, pursued to its proper consequences, must have a mighty influence on religion and morals. I shall therefore examine it distinctly, and shall first offer some general considerations concerning God's moral attributes, to shew that they must necessarily be ascribed to the Supreme Being: and then shall proceed to obviate the principal objections he hath advanced: after which I shall point to the manifold inconsistencies and contradictions he hath fallen into in relation to this subject.

I shall begin with some general considerations concerning God's moral attributes.

And 1. It is essential to the idea of God, that he is the *all-perfect* Being. So our author frequently calls him, and makes it necessary for us to regard him under that notion†. That is a remarkable declaration which he makes Vol. III. p. 299. "I know, for I can demonstrate by connecting the clearest and most distinct of my real ideas, that there is a God, a first intelligent cause of all things, whose infinite wisdom and power appear evidently in all his works, and to whom therefore I ascribe most rationally every other perfection, whether conceivable or not conceivable by me." Here he mentions distinctly, as his manner is, God's *infinite wisdom and power*, and takes no particular notice of his goodness; but surely this must be supposed to be included, when he adds, that not only wisdom and power, but *every other perfection conceivable by us*, must be most rationally ascribed to God. For is not goodness a perfection? And is it not conceivable by us? Yea, is it not the most amiable of all perfections, and that which gives a lustre and glory to all the rest? Is it possible to conceive a perfect character

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 453.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 253.

without it? Almighty power and infinite wisdom, if they could be supposed separated from goodness and righteousness, in the great Governor of the world, would create horror and aversion instead of love and esteem. A God destitute of justice and goodness would be such a God, as he most wrongfully represents the God of Moses and St. Paul to be, an unjust, a cruel, a partial, and arbitrary Being\*!

He is sensible, that in our ideas of perfection, goodness and righteousness, or his moral attributes, are necessarily included: and that consequently according to the rule he had laid down, *viz.* that it is *rational* for us to ascribe to God every perfection, whether *conceivable* or *inconceivable by us*, we ought most certainly to ascribe to him righteousness, goodness, and truth. He endeavours therefore to guard against this by saying, though in plain contradiction to what he had before advanced:— “ Let us not measure his perfections by ours. Let us not presume so much as to ascribe our perfections to him, even according to the highest conceptions we are able to form of them; though we reject every imperfection conceivable by us, when it is imputed to him †.” He observes, that “ the first and strongest impressions that we receive of benevolence, justice, and other moral virtues, come from reflections on ourselves and others; from what we feel in ourselves, and from what we observe in other men. These we acknowledge to be, however limited and imperfect, the excellencies of our own nature, and therefore conceiving them without any limitation or perfection, we ascribe them to the Divine.” But he says, “ a very short analysis of the excellencies of our own nature will be sufficient to shew, that they cannot be applied from man to God without profaneness, nor from God to man without the most shameful absurdity ‡.” It will be easily acknowledged, that we cannot ascribe any of those qualities in our nature, which necessarily connote imperfection, to God in a literal and proper sense; but to say that we ought not to ascribe those, which we cannot but look upon as the noblest excellencies and perfections of an intelligent Being, and of which we clearly discern the traces and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 567.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 558.

‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 88, 89.

resemblances in our own nature, to the infinitely perfect Being, at the same time taking care to remove every imperfection with which they are attended in us and our fellow-creatures, is highly absurd, and a manifest contradiction to the common sense of mankind. It is to say, that we are to conceive of God as the infinitely perfect Being, and yet we are not to ascribe to him those excellencies which we cannot possibly avoid regarding as necessarily included in the idea of infinite perfection. Nor is this, as he is pleased to represent it, a making man the *original*, and God only a *copy*\*; or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, a supposing God to be no more than an *infinite man*†. This argument, if it may be called so, is only a playing upon words. The word *man* carries in it the idea of a finite, imperfect, created being; and therefore to call God an infinite man has a very odd sound. But if the meaning only be, that as man is an intelligent being, so God is infinite intelligence; and as man has moral dispositions, the imperfect seeds and principles of goodness, justice, benevolence, God hath all these in the highest possible degree of eminency, without any imperfection and defect; what is there in this unworthy of the supreme and absolutely perfect Being? It is true that, as he observes, *we do not know the manner of his being*‡; but as this by his own acknowledgment is no argument against ascribing to him wisdom and power, so neither is it against our ascribing to him justice and goodness. He there asserts, that “we rise from the knowledge of ourselves, and of the other works of God, to a knowledge of his existence, and of his wisdom and power, which we call infinite.” And may it not equally be said, that we rise from the consideration of his works, and the illustrious displays of beneficent goodness to be found there, and from the knowledge of the moral sentiments in our own breasts, and which we cannot but approve, to the knowledge of his goodness, and moral excellencies? And since, by the very constitution of our minds, we cannot help regarding them as perfections, we are naturally led to ascribe them in the supreme degree to the *All-perfect* Being. And to say, that when we do so, we make ourselves the original, and him only the copy, is a strange misrepresentation: for in that case we rise from the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 87. † Ibid. p. 310. ‡ Ibid. p. 88.  
imperfect

imperfect traces and lineaments of those excellencies in our own souls, or which we discern in others, to the supreme goodness and benevolence, of which all human and created goodness is but a very faint and imperfect copy. And what can be more reasonable than to conclude, that he must be infinitely good and just, and true, who made us capable of discerning and feeling the amiableness and excellence of those moral dispositions and qualities, and who hath spread such beauty and order, and such a profusion of blessings, throughout this vast system!

Again, the moral attributes of God may be farther argued from this, that they are really inseparable from infinite wisdom and intelligence: and since wisdom could not be perfect without goodness and justice, these moral attributes must be ascribed to the Supreme Being as well as wisdom, which our author everywhere ascribes to him. We may as reasonably suppose him without the one as the other. As there are innumerable things which shew his wisdom, so there are which demonstrate his goodness and benignity. And if there are several appearances which we find it hard to reconcile to our ideas of goodness, so there are which seem not to be consistent with wisdom. And the answer is the same in both cases, that it is owing to our ignorance, and the narrowness of our views; and we shall soon find our author in effect acknowledging this. Power and wisdom without goodness and righteousness are so far from giving us a proper idea of an All-perfect Being, that it is the idea of a very imperfect one. This writer himself observes, that “if God be infinitely wise, he always knows and always does that which is fittest to be done: to choose the best end, and to proportion the means to it, is the very definition of wisdom\*.” And accordingly he asserts, that the wisdom of God always determineth him to do that *which is fittest upon the whole*. And this necessarily supposeth an universal rectitude of his nature. It includes both a perfect unerring knowledge of what is fittest and best, and a disposition and determination to act accordingly, and to do what is, all things considered, best and fittest to be done. And this is really to acknowledge God’s moral attributes: for, as our author observes, “that which is fittest to be done is always just

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 332.

“and good\*.” So that God’s wisdom is necessarily supposed to be connected with his justice and goodness, as well as they with his wisdom; and a regard to both is comprehended in choosing what is fittest to be done. Wisdom separated from justice and goodness would not be true wisdom, which always includes the worthiest ends and properest means, but craft, which is not a real perfection, but the contrary.

This writer shews that he is sensible of this, when he asserts, that God’s moral attributes are only “different modifications of his wisdom; and are barely names that we give to various manifestations of the infinite wisdom of one simple un compounded Being.” And he blames the divines for supposing, “that they are in him, what they are in us, distinct affections, dispositions, and habitudes †.” He says, that “after all that has been said to prove a necessary connexion between his physical and moral attributes, we may observe them in his wisdom ‡.” And that “if they are so intimately connected with his power and wisdom, and so much the same in nature, that they cannot be separated in the exercise of them, in this case his natural attributes absorb the moral §,” But what are we to understand by absorb? May they not be intimately connected, and yet be of distinct consideration? Are not the divine power and wisdom intimately connected? Can they ever be separated in the exercise? Is his power ever a blind power, destitute of wisdom and intelligence? Or, is his wisdom an impotent wisdom, destitute of power? Yet he owns the ideas of power and wisdom in God to be distinct, though they are neither of them really distinguished from his essence. He is indeed pleased to pass a censure on the divines, for *parcelling out a divine moral nature into various attributes like the human* ||. And he sometimes seems to find fault with the distinguishing any attributes at all in God. He says, that “since the wisdom of God is as much God as the will of God, and the will as the wisdom, it is absurd to distinguish them: that it is something worse to reason about the divine, as we do about the human intellect, and to divide and parcel out the former upon the plan of the latter. Since the will of God

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 313.

† Ibid. p. 23.

§ Ibid. p. 313.

‡ Ibid. p. 335.

|| Ibid. p. 453.

is not like that of man, dark and liable to be seduced, why are we led to conclude that a superior faculty is necessary to determine it, as the judgment of reason does, or should, determine that of man? Yet he immediately after distinguishes between the *will* and *knowledge* of God, and supposes it necessary to distinguish them *to be* (as he expresses it) *a little more intelligible*\*: and elsewhere he talks of the *rule which infinite wisdom prescribes to infinite power*†. And all along throughout his essays he speaks of wisdom and power as distinct attributes of God. The one therefore does not, to use his expression, *absorb* the other, though they are not separated in the exercise. This shews that perfections may be intimately connected without being absorbed, or, in other words, confounded one with another: and therefore it is no argument, that there are no such distinct attributes as justice, or righteousness and goodness, because they are intimately and inseparably connected with his power and wisdom. On the contrary, this supposes that there are such attributes. For it would be absurd to talk of their being connected with his wisdom, or of their being to be *absorbed* in his wisdom, if there were no such qualities, or attributes: and since, as Lord Bolingbroke himself elsewhere acknowledgeth, *we must speak of God after the manner of men*‡, if we speak of these qualities at all, we must speak of them as distinct attributes.

Let us now consider our author's objections.

1. He urges, that "the moral as well as physical attributes of God can only be known *a posteriori*. They must be discerned in the works of God, and in the conduct of Providence. And it is evident they are not, cannot be so discerned in them, as to be the objects of our imitation§. Every thing shews the power and wisdom of God, conformably to our ideas of wisdom and power in the physical world and in the moral; but every thing does not shew in like manner the justice and goodness of God, conformably to our ideas of these attributes in either||. None of the phænomena can be strained into a repugnancy to the divine wisdom; but it cannot be disputed, that many of them are repugnant to our ideas of goodness and

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 5.

† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 53.

‡ Ibid. vol. v. p. 468.

§ Ibid. p. 63.

|| Ibid. p. 311.



“justice\*.” Some other passages to the same purpose were mentioned above, which I need not here repeat. In opposition to this it may be observed, that, as was before hinted, the characters of goodness and benignity are conspicuous in the constitution of things, as well as of wisdom and power. And if there are several particular phænomena not conformable to our ideas of goodness and righteousness, there are also several appearances not conformable to our ideas of wisdom, and the reasons and designs of which do not appear. It is well known, that many are the objections which the atheists have made against the wisdom of God, as appearing in the constitution both of the natural and moral world. It is his own observation, that “we must be prepared to meet with several appearances which we cannot explain, nor therefore reconcile to the ideas we endeavour to form of the divine perfection.” If it be true, that infinite wisdom and power created and govern the universe, it cannot but follow, that some of the phænomena may be proportionable, and that others must be disproportionable to our and to every other finite understanding †.” He very properly exposes the absurdity of the atheists in arguing against the existence, attributes, and providence of God, from the difficulties relating to them; and observes, that “these difficulties do not embarrass the theist — and instead of being surpris’d to find them, he would be surpris’d not to find them — That there must be many phænomena both physical and moral, for which he can, and for which he cannot account — And that there are secrets of the divine nature and œconomy which human reason cannot penetrate ‡.” The difficulties therefore relating to the divine goodness are no reason for not acknowledging that goodness, any more than the difficulties relating to the divine wisdom are a good reason against acknowledging the wisdom of God. We may here apply his own way of arguing. “The power of executing,” says he, “is seen in every instance; and though we cannot discern the wisdom of contrivance and direction in every instance, yet we see them in so many, that it becomes the highest absurdity not to acknowledge them in all.” And he takes notice of the

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 368.

† *Ibid.* p. 365.

‡ *Ibid.* vol. iii. p. 186, 187.

folly of atheists in objecting against it, whereby they only shew their own ignorance. He adds, that “ the wisdom of God is not so often discernible by us as the power of God, nor the goodness as the wisdom. But a multitude of the phænomena being conformable to our ideas of goodness, we may reason about it as we did just now about the divine wisdom \*;” *i. e.* that though we cannot discern the goodness of God according to our ideas in every thing, yet we see it in so many, that it would be the highest absurdity not to acknowledge it in all; where he seems to me plainly to give up the point, and to assert, that we ought to acknowledge the goodness of God, even according to our ideas of goodness, as well as his wisdom, to be an attribute belonging to the Supreme Being: and that this may be justly argued from his works.

But let us proceed to consider some other of his objections: He argues against ascribing moral attributes, or the excellencies of our nature to God, because we cannot ascribe to him fortitude and temperance. He asketh, “ How can we deduce fortitude from the attributes of God, or ascribe this virtue to him, who can endure no pain, nor be exposed to any danger? How temperance, when it would be the most horrid blasphemy to suppose him subject to any human appetites and passions, and much more to some so inordinate as to require a particular virtue to restrain and govern them? I might bring many more instances of the same kind. But he who will not be convinced by these, how absurdly the laws of nature are founded by some writers in the moral attributes of God, will be convinced by none †.” He seems to have a good opinion of this way of arguing, for he urges it more than once ‡. But though fortitude, as it signifies a bearing up under evils and sufferings, and temperance, as it signifies the restraining and governing the appetites and passions, cannot be properly ascribed to God, because they necessarily connote the being liable to evils and imperfections, it doth not follow, that therefore righteousness and goodness, and universal benevolence, which imply no such imperfection, and are the noblest excellencies of an intelligent nature that we can

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol 7. p. 335. † Ibid. p. 90. ‡ Ibid. p. 311.



possibly conceive, may not be applied to the Supreme and Absolutely-perfect Being: and as to fortitude and temperance, though they cannot be properly ascribed to God, no more than piety and submission and resignation to the divine will, which are eminent human virtues, yet they are the objects of the divine approbation, and our obligation to them may be justly argued and deduced from God's moral attributes, from his holiness and the rectitude of his nature, which causeth him to delight in moral beauty and order, and to require that his reasonable creatures should act in a manner becoming the excellent faculties he hath given them; and that they should maintain that temper and conduct which tendeth to the true perfection and happiness of their natures, which these virtues manifestly do.

He farther objects, that "our ideas of the divine attributes must necessarily be inadequate, both on account of the infinite distance between the divine and human nature, and on account of the numberless and to us unknown relations, respectively to all which the divine providence acts: which, if we did know them, we should be unable to compare, and in which, therefore, the harmony of the divine perfections would not be discernible by us—That therefore we are very incompetent judges of the moral attributes of God, and of what they require God should do in the government of the world—Nor can we make any true judgment, or argue with any certainty about them," as he endeavours to prove from the authority of St. Paul, and Dr. Barrow\*. This only proves what will be easily allowed, that we cannot comprehend or see the whole extent of the divine proceedings; and that he may in many cases have reasons for his proceedings which we are not acquainted with; but does not prove, that there is no such thing as goodness or righteousness in God, according to our ideas of them, nor any thing equivalent to them; or that we can in no case argue from what his goodness and righteousness require, nor judge of the equity of his proceedings. Although the Scriptures often speak of God's ways of providence as above human comprehension, yet they also represent him as sometimes appealing to men them-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 359. 362.

selves concerning the equity of his proceedings. Our author indeed represents this as an absurdity, but he does not prove it so, or shew that there is any thing in it unworthy of the most wise and righteous and benevolent Governor of the world. Will it follow, that because there are some difficult cases concerning which we cannot judge, that therefore we cannot judge in any case at all? We may in some cases safely argue from our ideas of the divine goodness and justice; *e. g.* that he will order it so, that a remarkable difference shall be made upon the whole between good and bad men; and that virtue shall be rewarded, and vice and wickedness punished. Will any man say, that we cannot safely conclude from the goodness and justice of the Supreme Being, that he will not suffer or appoint an innocent creature to be eternally miserable? He observes, speaking of God's knowledge, power and wisdom, that "though we cannot frame full and adequate ideas of them, it will not follow that we have, properly speaking, no knowledge at all of his attributes, nor of the manner in which they are exercised—That our ideas of divine intelligence and wisdom may be neither fantastical nor false, and yet God's manner of knowing may be very different from ours\*." In like manner it may be said, concerning God's moral attributes, his justice and goodness, that though we cannot frame full and adequate ideas of them, it will not follow that we have, properly speaking, no knowledge of them at all, and of the manner in which they are exercised. Our ideas of them are neither false nor fantastical, though in many instances they may be exercised in a way different from our apprehension. To this may be applied what he saith against Archbishop King, that "though we have not a direct knowledge of the nature of God by archetypal ideas, yet we are not reduced to know nothing of him except by analogy. It is a real knowledge, and may be said to be direct, if we may be allowed to call any knowledge by demonstration direct †."

Another argument urged by this writer, to shew that the divines are in the wrong to talk of God's infinite goodness and justice as of his wisdom and power, is this: that "the latter pre-serve their nature without any conceivable bounds, and the

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 524, 525.

† Ibid. p. 539.



“former must cease to be what they are, unless we conceive them bounded. Their nature implies necessarily a limitation in the exercise of them\*.” In answer to this, it may be observed, that God’s wisdom and power, considered in themselves, and as they are in God, are infinite; so also are his goodness and justice: but considered relatively in the exercise of them as terminated in the creature, the one may be said to be limited as well as the other; *i. e.* the effects of neither of them are properly infinite. Infinite power and wisdom, as exercised on the creature, produce finite and limited effects; so doth infinite goodness and justice: but still considered as qualities and attributes of the divine essence, they are infinite, of an eminent and transcendent nature, and would be really in God, though there were no creature formed. He did not begin to be good when the creatures began to exist, though then the exercise of goodness, under the direction of his wisdom, respecting the creatures, began.

His other objections proceed all upon a gross misrepresentation of the sentiments of those whom he hath thought fit to oppose. He chargeth Dr. Clarke with asserting, that justice and goodness, and the rest of the moral attributes, are in God just what they are in our *imperfect, unsteady, complex ideas*; and that the rule according to which God exerciseth those attributes, *viz.* the nature and reason of things, is obvious to the understanding of all intelligent beings †. This is not true, if understood of the whole nature and reason of things in all its vast extent; nor has that learned divine any-where asserted that it is so.

Again he represents the divines as asserting, that “the will of God is not determined by the harmonious concurrence of all his attributes,” and that “his goodness and justice do not act in a concurrence with his wisdom ‡.” He charges them with maintaining, that “goodness in God is the only directing and governing principle, and not wisdom: and that wisdom ought to contrive, and power to execute, under this direction.” And he argues, that “if it were so, the happiness of man ought to be proportionable to the goodness of God, that is, infinite.” And in opposition to this he asserts, that “wisdom ought to be deemed

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 528.

† Ibid. p. 252.

‡ Ibid. p. 313. 342.

“the directing principle of divine conduct\*.” Nor will any divine deny that wisdom is the directing principle. They all plead for the harmonious concurrence of the divine attributes, though they are not for confounding those attributes. Goodness in God is not to be regarded as a blind instinct, which necessarily acteth at all times, and in every instance, to the utmost extent of its capacity, and to the highest possible degree; but as a most wise goodness, *i. e.* a goodness which is always in conjunction with, and under the direction of, infinite wisdom. For goodness without distinction or discernment could scarce be accounted a virtue or a perfection. Such a notion of the divine goodness would be dishonourable to God, and of ill consequence to the interests of religion and virtue in the world. But his goodness is that of a most holy and understanding mind, and is always exercised in such a way as seemeth most fit to his infinite wisdom, which governeth the outward effects of it, and appointeth when, where, and how, it shall be communicated. We are not merely to fix our views on goodness and benevolence, in considering what God may do or may not do with regard to the happiness of his creatures; but to take in every consideration, that of his wisdom, his justice, his holiness and righteousness, and the majesty of his government.

He frequently accuses the divines, and even the ancient theists, for supposing that God made man for this end, to communicate happiness to him. But then, that he may more effectually expose this notion, he claps in the word *only*, as if they maintained, that God had no other end in view in creating man, but to make him happy to the utmost possible degree, to give him an *happiness without alloy*, as he expresseth it, and to *make him not only moderately, but immoderately happy in the world* †. It is thus that he thinks fit to represent their sense: and he says, “this is an *hypothesis which the phenomena contradict* ‡. But though it cannot reasonably be denied, that, according to the best conceptions we can form, one principal motive in God’s making reasonable beings was to communicate happiness to them, yet I think we do not know enough of God, nor have a sufficiently

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 341.

† Ibid. p. 345. 392. 421.

‡ Ibid. p. 345.

comprehensive view of things, and of the reasons an infinite mind might have for his proceedings, to pronounce confidently, that he had, and could have, no other reason or motive. It may well be supposed, that in bringing this vast universe and the various orders of beings in it into existence, he had in view the exercise and display of his own glorious perfections, not merely of any one, but of all his perfections, his majesty and greatness, his wisdom, power, holiness, and goodness, in conjunction. This is an end worthy of God, as far as he can be said to propose an end to himself. And when it is said, that he made his reasonable creatures with a design to communicate happiness to them, it must be understood thus: that he had it in view to make them happy, in such a way, in such measures and degrees, in such times, seasons, and proportions, as should seem fit to his infinite wisdom, and should be most worthy of them, and becoming his own glorious perfections. His end in creating them was not absolutely to make every individual of them happy at all events, however they should behave; but conditionally to make them happy in the right use and improvement of their own powers, and in such a way as is consistent with moral agency and government, and becoming his own infinite wisdom, goodness, righteousness, and purity.

It is farther with a view to expose the doctrine of the divines relating to the goodness of God, that he represents it as their general sentiment, that all things were made merely for the sake of man; that this vast universal system was formed for him alone: and he sets himself to shew, as he might easily do, the absurdity of supposing the whole universe to have been made merely for some minute part of it\*. This particularly is the subject of the 45th and 46th of his fragments and essays. But it is observable, that he himself, after having abused the divines for supposing that God made man to communicate happiness to him, expressly asserts, that “God has made us happy, and has put it  
“into our power to make ourselves happier, by a due use of our  
“reason, which leads us into the practice of moral virtue, and  
“all the duties of society †.” “That we are obliged to our  
“Creator for a certain rule, and sufficient means of arriving at

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 330.

† Ibid. p. 384.

“happiness,

“happiness, and have none to blame but ourselves, when we fail of it\*.”—“That God made us to be happy here.—He may make us happier in another system of being.—That there is even in this world much more good than evil, and the present state of mankind is happy in it †.”—“And that the end of the human state is human happiness ‡.”

You are, I doubt not, by this time prepared for what I proposed to shew in the last place, the contradictions and inconsistencies our author has fallen into in treating of this subject. I suppose you to bear in mind the severe censures he hath passed upon the divines for pretending to connect the physical and moral attributes of God, and for ascribing to him moral attributes, justice and goodness, according to our ideas. And now I desire you to compare the passages already produced with those that follow.

God shews us our duty, “by which we stand in the relation of subjects and servants to a gracious and beneficent Lord and Master, who gave us laws neither captious nor ambiguous, and who commands us nothing which it is not our interest to perform§. He here supposes it to be a thing evident from the law of nature, that we stand in relation to God as our *gracious and beneficent Lord and Master*, who has our interest and happiness in view in the very laws he enjoins. And is not this plainly to ascribe goodness to him, even according to our ideas of goodness? And elsewhere he represents it, as if he could not ask more of a *beneficent Creator* than he has done for us||. He says, “the thief acknowledges whatever God has done to be just and good in itself, though it doth not appear such in every instance, conformably to his ideas of justice and goodness. He imputes the difference to the defect of his ideas, and not to any defect of the divine attributes.—Where he sees them, he owns them explicitly: where he does not see them, he pronounces nothing about them. He is as far from denying them” (*i. e.* from denying the justice and goodness of God) “as he is from denying the wisdom and power of God\*\*.” The most orthodox divine could hardly express himself more fully on this

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 388.

† Ibid. p. 391, 392.

‡ Ibid. p. 544. § Ibid. p. 97. || Ibid. p. 481. \*\* Ibid. p. 311, 312.



head than Lord Bolingbroke has here done. To the same purpose he introduces a meditation or soliloquy of a sincere and devout theist, in which he represents him as saying, among other things, "Man enjoys numberless benefits by the fitness of his nature to this constitution, unasked, unmerited, freely bestowed. The *wisdom and goodness* of God are therefore manifest. May I enjoy thankfully the benefits bestowed on me by the divine liberality: may I receive the evils to which I am exposed patiently, nay willingly\*."

But what deserves particularly to be remarked is, that whereas he represents the ascribing goodness and justice to God according to our ideas, to be what gives great advantage to the atheists with regard to the original of evil; as if he thought it impossible to reconcile the evil that is in the world with God's moral attributes, and the supposition of his being good and righteous and holy, as well as powerful and wise; he has taken great pains to confute his own arguments. For not a few of his fragments and essays in his fifth volume are taken up in endeavouring to remove and answer that objection, and to shew that the evil there is in the present constitution of things in this world, is reconcilable to the justice and goodness of God, even according to the ideas we form of them†. He undertakes to defend the *goodness* of God against the atheists and divines‡! And having, as he pretends, done this, he proceeds to vindicate the *justice and righteousness* of God against the same confederates§. Thus the same author, who had used his utmost efforts to shew, in opposition to the divines, that moral attributes, particularly justice and goodness, ought not to be ascribed to God according to the ideas we conceive of them, and that we cannot form any judgment concerning them, takes upon him afterwards to vindicate those very attributes against the divines, who, he pretends, are for destroying them. So strangely inconsistent is this writer's scheme, that on the one hand, with a view to invalidate the argument for a state of future retributions drawn from the moral attributes of God, he endeavours to take away those attributes,

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 338, 339—See also l. iii. p. 358.

† See vol. v. frag. 43, 44, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54.

‡ Ibid. p. 335.

§ Ibid. p. 393.

or confound them with the physical, and to shew that there is no such thing as goodness or justice in God according to our ideas, nor any thing equivalent to them; and that the phænomena are repugnant to those attributes: and on the other hand, with the same view of weakening or destroying the argument for a future state from those attributes, he sets himself to prove, that the present state of things is sufficiently conformable to our ideas of the divine justice and goodness, and that these attributes are so fully exercised or displayed here, that there is no need for any further manifestation or display of them hereafter.

I shall only produce one passage more, and it is a very remarkable one. Towards the conclusion of his last volume, when he pretends to draw a line of separation between natural and artificial theology, he observes, that by that, *viz.* natural theology, “we are taught to acknowledge and adore the infinite wisdom and power of God, manifested in every part of his creation, and ascribe *goodness* and *justice* to him wherever he intended that we should so ascribe them, that is, wherever either his works, or the dispensations of his providence, do as necessarily communicate these notions to our minds, as those of wisdom and power are communicated to us in the whole extent of both. Wherever they are not so communicated, we may assume very reasonably, that it is on motives strictly conformable to all the divine attributes, and therefore to goodness and justice, though unknown to us, from whom so many circumstances, with a relation to which the divine providence acts, must be often concealed: or, we may resolve all into the wisdom of God, and not presume to account for them morally\*.” The last part of this passage hath a reference to his scheme of resolving all into the divine wisdom. But you cannot but observe here, that after his repeated invectives against the divines, and against artificial theology, for ascribing moral attributes to God, justice and goodness, according to our ideas of them, he has in effect here acknowledged all that the divines themselves teach. They believe that God is always good and just, though they do not pretend to account for the exercise of goodness and justice in every particular instance: but that enough

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 517.

we know to convince us of both: the notions of which, this writer himself here owns to be, in many instances at least, necessarily communicated to us from his works; and surely then we should endeavour to resemble him in these his moral perfections, as far as we know them.

Before I conclude this letter, I shall take some notice, because I shall not afterwards have so proper an opportunity for it; of what he hath observed concerning eternal ideas in God, and concerning the eternal reasons and fitnesses of things.

He finds great fault with Dr. Cudworth, Dr. Clarke, and others, for talking of ideas in God, as if they supposed his manner of knowing to be exactly the same with ours; which certainly was far from their intention. He pronounces, that "the doctrine of eternal ideas in the divine mind has been much abused by those who are in the delirium of metaphysical theology. It cannot be understood in a literal sense." And he thinks "such a way of talking is profane as well as presumptuous; and that it is silly too, and mere cant\*." He has several observations, which are for the most part very just, to shew, that God's manner of knowing is very different from ours, and that he does not know by the help or intervention of ideas as we do †. I need not take particular notice of those observations, which contain little in them, that will not be acknowledged by those whom he has thought to oppose. The rash and improper use of the word *ideas*, as applied to God, hath no doubt led to mistakes, and to wrong and unwarrantable ways of expression: as any one must be convinced that knows what contentions there have been in the schools about the divine ideas, which have given rise to arrogant and foolish questions, scarce consistent with the veneration that is due to the supreme incomprehensible Being. Yet the modest use of that expression is not to be too rigidly censured. Our author himself, who blames it so much in others, hath on several occasions fallen into the same manner of expression himself. Thus he observes, that "it might be determined in the *divine ideas*, that there should be a gradation of life and intellect "throughout the universe ‡:" and he repeats it again, "that this

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 356.

† Ibid. p. 355, 356, 357. vol. v. p. 35, 36, 37, 38.

‡ Ibid. p. 337.

" appeared

“ appeared necessary or fit in the *divine ideas*, that is, to speak more rationally, to the supreme divine reason or intention\*.” Where he useth the term *divine ideas* as equivalent to the *divine reason and intention*, though he thinks the latter more proper. He elsewhere declares, that “ the *ideas* of God, if we may ascribe *ideas* to him, no more than his ways, are those of man†.” And in one of his most celebrated pieces, published in his own lifetime, he saith, that “ God in his *eternal ideas*, for we are able to conceive no other manner of knowing, has prescribed to himself that rule by which he governs the universe he created‡.” Here he not only ascribes ideas to God, but *eternal ideas*, by which God hath prescribed to himself a rule for his governing the world. This rule he there explaineth to be “ a fitness arising from the various natures, and more various relations of things, in the system which he hath constituted:” which fitness he there supposeth to have been known to God in his *eternal ideas*. And yet he hath frequently inveighed against Dr. Clarke, for speaking of the eternal reasons and relations of things. This particularly is the subject of the second, fifty-eighth, and fifty-ninth of his fragments and essays in the fifth volume of his works. He treats that learned divine as if he maintained, that these reasons and fitnesses of things were real natures, existing independently of God, and co-eternal with him: and yet he himself, speaking of Dr. Cudworth and others, observeth, that when they talk of eternal ideas and essences independent on the will of God, “ they do not mean by these eternal independent natures, any natures at all, but such intelligible essences and *rationes* of things, as are objects of the mind§.” And it is his own observation, that “ God knew from all eternity every system that he created in time—the relations things should bear—and the proportions they should have||:” And that “ to the divine omniscience the future is like the present;” and therefore he thinks it improper to talk of *prescience* in God. He represents it as “ a great truth, that the whole series of things is at all times actually present to the divine mind, so that we

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 365.

† Ibid. p. 344.

‡ See Idea of a Patriot King, in vol. iii. of his Works, p. 53.

§ Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 15.

|| Ibid. p. 7.

“ may say properly, that God knows things, because they are “ actual to him\*.” According to his own representation therefore it may be justly said, that all the fitnesses and relations of things were from the beginning actually present to the divine mind. And he accordingly declares, that God was *determined* by his *infinite wisdom* to *proceed with his creatures in all the exertions of his power, according to the fitness of things* †: or in other words, as he elsewhere expresseth it, God does *not govern by mere arbitrary will*, but always *does that which is fittest to be done*; and which he from all eternity saw would be fittest to be done. And this seems to be all that is really intended by those who speak of the eternal reasons and fitnesses of things. Whether therefore the manner of expression be strictly proper or not, this writer had no right to pass so severe a censure upon it as he has done, since it comes so near to his own.

But I believe you will think it is time to quit this subject, and pass on to some other things in Lord Bolingbroke’s works, which relate to things of no small importance, and which will deserve a particular consideration.

I am yours, &c.

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 457, 458.

† Ibid. p. 435:

## L E T T E R    X X I V .

*The Doctrine of Divine Providence nearly connected with that of the Existence of God—Lord Bolingbroke's Account of it considered—He acknowledges a general, but denies a particular Providence, and asserts, that Providence relates only to collective Bodies, but doth not extend to Individuals—The true Notion of Providence stated—What we are to understand by a particular Providence—The Reasonableness of believing it, and the great Importance of it shewn—The contrary Scheme is absurd, and inconsistent with itself, and of the worst Consequence to Mankind—The Objections against a particular Providence examined—Concerning occasional Interpositions—They are not properly miraculous, nor Deviations from the general Laws of Providence, but Applications of those Laws to particular Cases—To acknowledge such Interpositions is not to suppose the World governed by Miracles, nor to introduce an universal Theocracy like the Jewish—Angels may be employed in particular Cases as Ministers of Providence.*

SIR,

**T**HE doctrine of divine providence hath a very near connexion with that of the existence of the Deity, and is no less necessary to be believed. To acknowledge a God that brought all things into existence, and yet to deny that he afterwards taketh care of the creatures he hath made, or that he exerciseth any inspection over them, as a moral governor, or concerneth himself about their actions, and the events relating to them, is, with regard to all the purposes of religion, the same thing as not to acknowledge a God at all. It is one great excellence of the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, that they every-where teach us to have a constant regard to the divine providence, as presiding over the universal system, and all the orders of beings in it, and as in a particular manner exercising a continual care and inspection towards mankind, observing all their actions, and ordering and disposing the events relating to them with infinite wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. But this doctrine

of providence, which, one should think, ought mightily to recommend the Scriptures to every good mind, seems to have been one principal ground of the prejudices which Lord Bolingbroke hath conceived against those sacred writings. It is true, that he frequently affecteth to shew a zeal for divine providence: he sets up as an advocate for its proceedings against the divines, who, he pretends, join with the atheists in misrepresenting and opposing it. But if his scheme be narrowly examined, it will appear, that, notwithstanding his fair pretences, he doth not acknowledge a providence in that sense in which it is most useful and necessary to believe it.

He declares, that “in asserting the justice of providence, he has chosen rather to insist on the most visible and undeniable course of a general providence, than to assume a dispensation of particular providences\*.” He observes, that “the world is governed by laws, which the Creator imposed on the physical and moral systems, when he willed them into existence, and which must be in force as long as they last; and any change in which would be a change in the systems themselves. These laws are invariable, but they are general, and from this generality what we call contingencies arise†.” “The course of things rolls on through a vast variety of contingent events; for such they are to our apprehension; according to the first impressions of motion that were given it by the first Mover, and under the direction of an universal providence‡.” “As to the brute animals, they are left under the direction of instinct: and as to men, God has given his human creatures the materials of physical and moral happiness, in the physical and moral constitution of things. He has given them faculties and powers, necessary to collect and apply these materials, and to carry on the work—This the Creator has done for us. What we shall do for ourselves, he has left to the freedom of our elections. This is the plan of divine wisdom: and we know nothing more particular, and indeed nothing more at all, of the dispensations of providence than this§.” This then is all the part he allows to providence in the moral world, that God has given man rea-

[ \* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 414.

‡ Ibid. p. 379.

† Ibid. p. 416.

§ Ibid. p. 473, 474-

son, and, as he elsewhere observes, passion\*, and has left him to the freedom of his own will, without ever concerning himself farther about the individuals of the human race, or exercising any inspection over men's moral conduct, in order to the rewarding the good, or punishing the bad. That this is his intention is manifest, by comparing this with other passages. He expressly declares, that "it is plain from the whole course of God's providence, that he regards his human creatures collectively, not individually, how worthy soever every one of them deems himself to be a particular object of the divine care†." This, of God's regarding men collectively, not individually, is what he frequently repeats; and it appears to be a principal point in his scheme. With the same view he declares, that the sanctions of the law of nature relate not to individuals, but to collective bodies‡. He finds fault with the notion, which, he says, obtained among the heathens, "that God was constantly attentive to the affairs of men§." And he asserts, that "God may foresee, or rather see, all the most contingent events that happen in the course of his general providence; but not provide for particular cases, nor determine the existence of particular men||." He observes, that "the divine providence has provided means to punish individuals, by directing men to form societies, and to establish laws, in the execution of which civil magistrates are the vicegerents of providence: and when the immorality of individuals becomes that of a whole society, then the judgments of God follow, and men are punished collectively in the course of a general providence." So that he allows no punishments by providence for individuals, but those which are executed by the civil magistrates. And if a man can escape punishment from them, he has nothing to fear from God, except the whole community be as bad as himself: and even then the punishment may not happen in that or the next age, till he shall be no more.

Our author indeed sometimes declares, that "he neither affirms nor denies particular providences\*\*." And after having observed, that there is little credit to be given to the reports con-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 417.

† Ibid. p. 431.

‡ Ibid. p. 90. § Ibid. p. 211. || Ibid. p. 462. \*\* Ibid. p. 413, 414.



cerning particular acts of providence, wrought on particular occasions, he adds, that "yet he will not presume to deny, that "there have been any such\*." He makes the same declaration afterwards towards the end of his book †. But notwithstanding these professions, it is a point that he hath very much laboured to destroy, the belief of a particular providence. This is the express design of several of his Fragments and Essays in the fifth volume of his works; especially of the fifty-fifth, fifty-sixth, fifty-seventh, sixty-second, and sixty-fourth, of those Essays; in all which he argues directly, and in some of them largely, against that doctrine. And after having observed, that *what we find in the book of nature is undoubtedly the word of God*, he asserts, that "there we shall find no foundation for the scheme "of a particular providence ‡." He declares indeed, "that he "will not be so uncharitable as to say, that divines mean to "blaspheme [in their doctrine of a particular providence]," yet that this he will take upon him to say, that he "who follows "them cannot avoid presumption and profaneness, and must be "much on his guard against blasphemy §."

That I may observe some order in my reflections upon this subject, I shall first offer some observations for stating the right notion of divine providence, and what we are to understand by a particular providence: and then shall proceed to shew the absurdity and ill consequences of the author's scheme: and lastly, consider the arguments he hath urged in support of it, and the objections he hath made against the doctrine of a particular providence.

By the doctrine of providence I understand the doctrine of an all-perfect mind, preserving and governing the vast universe in all its parts, presiding over all the creatures, especially rational moral agents, inspecting their conduct, and superintending and ordering the events relating to them, in the best and fittest manner, with infinite wisdom, righteousness, and equity. And such a providence cannot reasonably be denied by those, who believe that the world was originally formed by a most wise and powerful and infinitely perfect Cause and Author: for whatever reasons

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 420.

‡ Ibid. p. 471.

† Ibid. p. 546.

§ Ibid. p. 464.

induced him to create the world, which may be justly supposed to have been for the communication of his goodness, and for the joint exercise and display of his glorious attributes and perfections, must equally dispose him to take care of it, and govern it, when made. Accordingly the Epicureans and others who denied a providence, did also deny that the world was made by God, and attributed the formation of it, not to the wisdom, the power, and will of an intelligent cause, but to a wild chance, or fortuitous concurrence of atoms, or to an equally blind fatal necessity. And so far their scheme, however false and absurd, was consistent with itself. For they could find no effectual way to exclude God from the government of the world, which was what they wanted to get rid of, but by excluding him from the making of it too. Supposing one supreme absolutely-perfect Cause and Author of all things, who made this vast universe, and all the orders of beings in it, which is what Lord Bolingbroke not only allows, but expressly asserts, it follows by the most evident consequence, that the same infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, which gave existence to the world and all things in it, still presideth over the universal frame in all its parts. The beautiful and constant order which is still maintained in the inanimate material system, plainly sheweth, that this stupendous frame of nature, consisting of such an inconceivable variety of parts, is under the constant superintendence of a most wise and powerful presiding mind, ever present to his own work. But the providence of God is especially to be considered as exercised towards reasonable creatures, moral agents, which are undoubtedly the noblest and most excellent of his creatures. The material system; whatever order or beauty appeareth in it, is not itself conscious of that beauty and order. Nor are mere sensitive beings capable of making proper reflections upon it, or of admiring, adoring, obeying the great Parent of the universe. This is the sole privilege of rational intelligent beings. If therefore the providence of God extendeth to any of his creatures at all, we may be sure that he exerciseth a special care over his reasonable creatures; and since he hath given them such noble faculties and moral powers, will govern them in a way suitable to those faculties and powers. And this certainly is the most admirable part of the divine administration in the government of the universe. For to govern

numberless myriads of active intelligent beings, in their several orders and degrees, each of whom have a will and choice of their own, and a power of determining their own actions; to exercise a constant superintendency over them, and to order the events relating to them, and to dispense to them proper retributions, not only according to their outward actions, but the inward dispositions and principles from which those actions flow; I say, thus to govern them, without infringing the liberty which belongeth to them as moral agents, must needs argue a wisdom as well as power that exceedeth our comprehension. Yet who will undertake to prove that this is impossible, or even difficult, to an infinite, all-comprehending mind? We may reasonably conceive that that immense Being, whose essence possesseth every part of this vast universe, is present to every individual of the human race. And if that most wise, holy, and absolutely-perfect Being, the Great Governor of the world, be always present to every individual of the human race, then every individual, and all their particular actions, cases, and circumstances, must be under his providential inspection and superintendency. And as he knoweth all these things when they actually happen, so he, to whom, by our author's own acknowledgment, future things are as if they were present, saw them before they came to pass. And therefore it was not difficult for him to form such a comprehensive scheme of things in his infinite mind, as should extend to all their particular cases, and the events relating to them, in a manner perfectly consistent with the exercise of their reasonable moral powers, and the use of their own endeavours.

And now it appears what is to be understood by the doctrine of a particular providence. It signifies, that Providence extends its care to the particulars or individuals of the human race, which is what this writer denies: that God exerciseth a continual inspection over them, and knoweth and observeth both the good and evil actions they perform, and even the most secret affections and dispositions of their hearts: that he observeth them not merely as an unconcerned spectator, who is perfectly indifferent about them, but as the supreme ruler and judge, so as to govern them with infinite wisdom, in a way consistent with their moral agency, and to reward or punish them in the properest manner, and in the fittest season. And as all their actions, so the events which

which befall them, are under his supreme direction and superintendency. Particular events are, in the ordinary course of things, ordered in such a manner, as is subordinate to the general laws of providence relating to the physical and moral world. And what are usually called occasional interpositions, are properly to be considered as applications of general laws to particular cases and occasions. They make a part of the universal plan of providence, and are appointed and provided for in it, as having been perfectly foreseen from the beginning, and originally intended in the government of reasonable beings.

The doctrine of a particular providence taken in this view is of vast consequence, and, if duly considered and believed, could scarce fail to have a happy influence over our whole temper and deportment. How solicitous, how earnestly desirous should this make us to approve ourselves to our supreme governor and judge, and to walk always as in his sight! What an animating consideration is it, when we set about the performance of a good action, to be assured, that God in his holy providence observeth the good deed in every circumstance, and is ready to assist and support us in it, and most certainly will not suffer it to pass unrewarded! On the other hand, what an effectual restraint would it be to wicked actions, if we had this thought strongly impressed upon our minds, that they are all perfectly known in every circumstance to the most wise and righteous governor of the world; and that if he should not at present follow them with immediate punishment, yet the time is coming, when he will call us to a strict account for them! Finally, a firm belief of a particular providence, as most wisely ordering and disposing the events relating to particular persons, is a source of satisfaction and comfort amidst all the uncertainties and fluctuations of this present world. No consideration is so well fitted to produce a cheerful resignation, and an inward solid peace and joy of heart, as this: that all things, all particular cases and circumstances, are under the direction and government of the most perfect wisdom, righteousness, and goodness; and that nothing can befall us without the direction or permission of the supreme disposer.

Nothing therefore could be worse founded than the boasts of the Epicureans, who expected to be applauded as friends and benefactors to mankind, on the account of their endeavours to

deliver them from the apprehensions of a providence. This might indeed be some relief to very bad men, and tend to make them easy in their sins; but it was an attempt to rob good men of that which is the chief support and comfort of their lives, and the most powerful encouragement to the steady uniform practice of piety and virtue. Lord Bolingbroke therefore was very ill employed, when he used his utmost efforts to destroy the doctrine of providence, as extending its care and inspection to individuals; since without this, the acknowledgment of what he calls a general providence would be of no great advantage, and would be, with regard to all the purposes of religion, little better than to deny that there is a providence at all.

This leads me to what I proposed to shew in the next place, *viz.* the absurdity and the ill consequences of the scheme his Lordship hath advanced.

It is an absurd and inconsistent scheme. He pretends to allow, that God's providence extends to nations and large communities, that it regards men collectively, but not individually. But it is hard to conceive how a proper care could be taken of collective bodies, if the individuals of which they were composed were absolutely neglected, and no regard had to them at all. A human government, that would have no regard to the cases of particular persons, to do them right or secure them from wrong, could scarce be accounted a government. Besides it may be asked what his Lordship means by collective bodies. There was a time when men had not yet formed themselves into political societies: must it be said that they were then not the objects of providence at all? Or, will it be allowed that providence extended its care to them whilst they were only in families? And how could families, either larger or smaller, be taken care of, if the individuals, of which families consist, were neglected? And when several families united together, and formed larger communities, must it be said, that providence quitted its care of the families to which it had extended before, and confined its inspection to those larger communities? And then it might be enquired, how large must a community be, in order to its being the proper object of divine providence? Does providence take notice of single cities, or smaller republics, or only of those communities which are become so numerous as to be united into large nations

or empires? It may be farther asked, in what sense is it to be understood, that providence extends its care to collective bodies? All that he understands by it seems to be this: that "the course of things has been always the same; that national virtue and national vice have always produced national happiness or misery in a due proportion, and are by consequence the great sanctions of the law of nature\*." The appointing this general constitution then seems to be all the concern that he allows to divine providence with regard to large communities or collective bodies: and the only sanctions he allows of the law of nature (as I shall have occasion more distinctly to shew, when I come to consider the account he gives of that law) are the public happiness or miseries of large societies or nations; and these are often some ages in operating. It frequently happens, that nations and large communities continue for a considerable time in great outward prosperity, when there is little national virtue remaining. And our author himself acknowledges, that the motives drawn from the effects of virtue and vice on collective bodies, are "such as particular persons will be apt to think do not concern them, because they consider themselves as individuals, and catch at pleasure rather than happiness †." And as nations are made up of families and smaller societies, if these be not well constituted, as they cannot be where there is no sense of religion, no fear of God, or regard to a providence as extending to individuals, there cannot be much national order or virtue.

Lord Bolingbroke would, in my opinion, have been more consistent with himself, if he had absolutely denied that providence hath any regard to mankind at all, than to pretend that it extends to collective bodies, but not to individuals: for the same arguments, which prove a providence as extending to mankind in general, do also, if rightly considered, prove that it is exercised towards particular persons, and extendeth to particular cases and circumstances. This writer sets himself, as hath been already observed, with great appearance of zeal, to vindicate the goodness and justice of divine providence in its dispensations towards mankind, in opposition both to atheists and divines. But how the justice and goodness of providence towards mankind

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 472.

† Ibid. vol. iv. p. 228.

can be vindicated, if no regard be had to individuals, it is hard to see. He himself observes, that "justice requires that punishments should be measured out in various degrees and measures, according to the various circumstances of particular cases, and in proportion to them\*." And again he repeats it, "that justice requires that rewards and punishments should be measured out in every particular case, in proportion to the merit and demerit of each individual †." How then can he pretend to vindicate the justice of providence in this present state, when he makes it essential to justice that regard should be had to the case of individuals, and yet affirms that providence doth not consider men individually at all, but only collectively?

And as his scheme is absurd and inconsistent with itself, so it is attended with the most pernicious consequences, which ought to create a horror of it in every well-disposed mind. If providence hath no regard to individuals, there can be no sense of the divine favour for good actions, no fear of the divine displeasure for evil ones; and, as will appear to be his Lordship's sentiment, no future account to be apprehended. Thus every man is left to do what is right in his own eyes, without the dread of a supreme Governor and Judge. It is true, God hath established general laws at the beginning, but he concerneth himself no farther. And our author will not allow that in these general laws, or the plan originally formed in the divine mind, God had any regard unto, or made any provision for, particular persons, actions, or events. Good men therefore have no resource in their calamities; no ground to apply to God for support under them; no expectation of assistance from him, or from any other being acting under his direction, as the ministers and instruments of his providence: they are deprived of the comforts arising from a consciousness of his special approbation and complacency, and from the prospects of reward from him here or hereafter. Thus *hope* is excluded, which, as his Lordship observes, "above all things softens the evils of this life, and is that cordial drop which sweetens every bitter potion, even the last ‡." On the other hand, wicked men have nothing to fear from God for their evil actions. He says indeed, in a passage cited above, that

\* Bellingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 494. † Ibid. p. 495. ‡ Ibid. p. 379.  
"providence

“ providence has provided means to punish individuals, by directing men to form societies, and to establish laws, in the execution of which civil magistrates are the vicegerents of providence:” but I do not see with what propriety upon his scheme civil magistrates can be said to be the vicegerents of providence; for if providence doth not consider men individually at all, how can magistrates, in punishing individuals, be regarded as the vicegerents of providence? Or if providence constituted them its vicegerents, and there were no sanctions at all proposed for particular persons but those of the civil laws, it would follow, that men may be as wicked as they will, and give as great a loose as they please to their appetites and passions, provided they can manage so as to escape punishment from human judicatories, which a man may do, and yet be a very bad man. Human magistrates are often themselves corrupt. Solomon’s observation is certainly just: *I have seen the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there,* Eccl. iii. 16. Very unjust things are often done under colour of forms of law. Or, suppose the laws good, and the magistrates just and upright, no human laws can reward or punish inward good or bad affections, intentions, and dispositions of the heart. If therefore there were no regard to a supreme Governor or Judge, to the divine approbation or displeasure, as extending to individuals, or to a future account, there is great reason to think, that mankind in general would be far more wicked and dissolute than they are. It is his Lordship’s observation, that, “ amidst the contingencies of human affairs, the odds will always be on the side of appetite—which reason cannot quite subdue in the strongest minds, and by which she is perpetually subdued in the weakest\*.” And accordingly the ablest politicians have thought the aids of religion, which especially includes a regard to providence as extending to individuals, absolutely necessary for strengthening the bands of civil government.

I shall now consider the arguments Lord Bolingbroke hath offered in support of his scheme, and the objections he hath advanced against the doctrine of a particular providence.

He frequently intimates, that the doctrine of a particular pro-

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. v. p. 479.



vidence is need'efs; " fince the ordinary courfe of things, prepared and conducted by a general providence, is fufficient to confirm what the law of nature and reafon teaches us\*." But it appears from what hath been already obferved, that the doctrine of a general providence, as he underftands it, *i. e.* a providence that has no regard to individuals at all, to their actions, or to the events that befall them, is far from being fufficient to the purpofes of religion and virtue, or of human focieties: that it neither furnifheth proper comfort and fupports for the encouragement of good men, nor is fufficient to ftrike terror into bad men, and to be a reftRAINT to vice and wickednefs. It hath alfo been fhewn, that the notion of a general providence, as excluding all regard to individuals, and to their actions and concerns, cannot be fupported, nor made to confift with reafon or with itfelf. And whereas it is reprefented as a degrading the divine Majefty, to fuppofe him to concern himfelf about what relates to fuch inconfiderable beings, as are the individuals of the human race: this objection, though varnifhed over with a pretence of confulting God's honour, doth at the bottom argue mean and unworthy notions of him. It is in effect a judging of God by our own imperfections. Our views are narrow and limited, and cannot take in many things at once, nor attend to fmaller matters without neglecting things of greater confequence: but it is otherwife with a Being of infinite perfection, who is intimately prefent to every part of this vaft univerfe, and knoweth and taketh care of all things at once, with the fame eafe as if he had only one fingle thing to attend to. He is capable of exercifing a moft wife providential care towards all his creatures in a way fuited to their feveral natures, conditions, and circumftances: nor can the multiplicity of things occafion the leaft confufion or perplexity in his all-comprehending mind.

The arguments which he urgeth againft a particular providence, in the fifty-feventh of his Fragments and Effays, for feveral pages together †, proceed upon a continued mifreprefentation of the fenfe of thofe whom he has thought fit to oppofe. He there chargeth the divines as maintaining, that God ought by particular providences to interpoze in every fingle inftance, for

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 404.

† Ibid. p. 424, & feq.  
giving

giving an immediate reward to every good action, and for punishing every evil one, even in this present state. He supposes them also to hold, that some men are necessarily determined to good actions by divine influences communicated to them, and others for want of those influences unavoidably determined to evil; and then he argues, that on such a supposition there would be no room for free choice, nor consequently for virtue or vice, merit or demerit, nor therefore justice or injustice\*. He urges further, that if good men were constantly and remarkably distinguished by a particular providence, it would be apt to produce presumption in them, to destroy or prevent their benevolence, and consequently their goodness; and to harden the wicked†: and that even on that supposition, the providence of God could not be vindicated in the opinion of mankind, or of divines themselves, since still it would not be agreed who were good men. The Mahometans, Christians, and different sects of the latter, would insist upon it, that goodness includes a belief of their distinguishing tenets, and an attachment to their several systems of religion. "One would pass for a good man at Rome, another "at Geneva," &c.‡. But he seems not to have considered, that upon the supposition he puts, there could be no place for this objection: since if every good man and good action was to be immediately and remarkably distinguished by a particular interposition of divine providence, and every bad man and evil action to be immediately punished, there would be no room left for men's passing different judgments concerning the goodness or badness of persons or actions; for on that supposition, there would be a visible determination of heaven in favour of every good man and good action; so that no man could doubt, upon seeing any person thus remarkably favoured and distinguished, that he was really good, whatever denomination he might pass under. But the truth is, no divine ever advanced such an hypothesis as he here argues against. By the doctrine of a particular providence, they do not mean a constant particular interposition of divine providence for rewarding every good man and virtuous action, and punishing every bad man and every wicked action, in an im-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 425, 426.

† Ibid. p. 428, 429.

‡ Ibid. p. 431, 432.

mediate and visible manner here on earth: on the contrary, they universally maintain, that this present state is a state of trial and discipline; and that it would be no way agreeable to the nature of such a state to have all good men and good actions immediately and remarkably rewarded, and all wicked men immediately punished: that the temporary sufferings of good men, and the prosperity of the wicked, are permitted for very wise ends, and may be reasonably and consistently accounted for, on the supposition that this present life is a state of trial; though they could not well be accounted for, if this were designed to be a state of final retributions, or to be the only state of existence allotted us.

The greatest part of what he offers against a particular providence in the sixty-second of his Fragments and Essays, relates to *occasional* interpositions, which he pretends would be miracles if they were real. "Such," he says, "they would be strictly, whether they were contrary to the established course of nature or not; for the miracle consists in the extraordinary interposition, as much as in the nature of the thing brought to pass: That the miracle would be as real in the one case as in the other; and the reality might be made evident enough by the occasion, by the circumstance, by the repetition of it on similar occasions, and in similar circumstances; and, above all, by this circumstance, that the assumed particular providence was a direct answer to particular prayers and acts of devotion offered up to procure it †." Here he takes upon him to give a new and arbitrary definition of a miracle. Though a thing hath nothing in it contrary to the established course of nature, yet it is to be regarded as a miracle, if there be supposed to be any special agency of the divine providence in it, suited to particular occasions and circumstances; and, above all, if it be supposed to come in answer to prayer. But if the occasional interpositions he refers to be perfectly agreeable to the general laws of nature and of providence, and be only special applications of general laws to particular occasions, I do not see how they can be properly said to be miraculous at all; or how their being supposed to come in answer to prayer can make them so.

But he urgeth farther, that "if providence were directed ac-

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 458, 459.

“ cording

“ cording to the particular desires, and even wants, of persons  
 “ equally well qualified and intitled to the divine favour, the  
 “ whole order of nature, physical and moral, would be subverted,  
 “ the affairs of mankind would fall into the utmost confusion —  
 “ and if this scheme were true, the world would be governed by  
 “ miracles, till miracles lost their name\*.”

But all this proceeds upon a great mistake of the point in question. None of the divines that hold a particular providence, *i. e.* a providence which extendeth its care to particular persons or individuals of the human race, maintain or suppose, that God must interpose to satisfy all the different desires and prayers of men, many of which, as he observes, are repugnant to one another. If the prayers be of the right kind, such as reason and religion prescribe, they must be always offered up with this condition or limitation, which the Scripture expressly directs us to, *viz.* that we must desire the things we pray for, so far and no farther than they are agreeable to the divine will, and to what it seemeth fit to God in his infinite wisdom to appoint. Supposing therefore a good man doth not obtain the particular blessing he prays for, he may rest satisfied in this, that it is what the divine wisdom doth not see fit to grant; and he only desired it under that condition. Or if he receives that particular good thing he prayed for, and regards it as an answer to his prayer, still there is nothing miraculous in the case. There is nothing done in contravention to the usual course of things which the divine wisdom hath established. It may justly be supposed to be a law of the moral world, that it is proper for us, in testimony of our dependence upon God, and in acknowledgment of his providence, to apply to him by prayer for the blessings we stand in need of: and that prayer so qualified as God requireth, proceeding from an honest and upright heart, and from good affections and intentions, and accompanied with the use of proper endeavours on our parts, is among the means appointed by divine wisdom for obtaining the most valuable benefits, especially those of a spiritual nature. And the blessings thus communicated may be justly said to be communicated, not in a miraculous way, but in a way that is perfectly agreeable to the general laws of providence, and the order

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 460.

which

which the divine wisdom hath appointed. Any one that considers this will easily see how little what our author has here offered is to the purpose; and yet he goes on to declaim after his manner, that particular providence puts a force on the mechanical laws of nature, and on the freedom of the will, in a multitude of instances; and that those who maintain this doctrine suppose, that the laws of gravitation must be sometimes suspended, sometimes precipitated, in compliance with men's desires, and the tottering edifice must be kept miraculously from falling\*.

Among the extraordinary interpositions of divine providence, he reckons "the metaphysical or physical influence of spirits, suggestions, silent communications, injections of ideas. These things," he declares, "he cannot comprehend; and he compares them to the altering or suspending the course of the sun, or revolutions of the earth, in the physical system. And that all such interpositions in the intellectual system, as should give thoughts and new dispositions to the minds of men, cannot be conceived without altering in every such instance the natural progression of the human understanding, and that freedom of the will which every man is conscious that he has." Our author has here let us know what he thinks of all revelations, inspirations, or communications from God the Supreme Spirit, or from subordinate created spirits, to the human mind; that he regards them as inconsistent with the *laws of the intellectual system*, and the *natural progression of the human understanding*, or *essential freedom of the will*. But whence could he know enough of the laws of the intellectual system, to be able to pronounce that this is inconsistent with those laws? That one man may suggest or communicate thoughts and ideas to another by words and language, and that there is nothing in this contrary to the nature and order of the understanding, or freedom of the will, is universally acknowledged: and why then should it be thought inconsistent with these, for God himself, or spiritual beings superior to man, to communicate thoughts or ideas to the human mind? The most natural way of working upon men as reasonable creatures, and of influencing their actions in a way agreeable to the just order of their faculties, is by suggesting proper

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 460.

† Ibid. p. 414, 415.

thoughts

thoughts or ideas to their minds, and our not being able particularly to explain how this is done, is no just objection against it. This writer himself elsewhere, speaking of *that extraordinary action of God upon the mind which the word Inspiration is now used to denote*, expressly acknowledges, that “it is no more incomprehensible than the ordinary action of mind on body, or body on mind\*.” And indeed it cannot without the highest absurdity be denied, that God can work upon the spirits of men by an immediate influence, and yet in such a way as is perfectly agreeable to their rational natures, and which may not put any constraint upon the freedom of their wills. And many cases may be supposed, in which his doing so may answer valuable ends. It may also be easily conceived, that he can make impressions upon men’s minds by various other means, which he may make use of in his wise and sovereign providence to this purpose, without at all infringing the order of things in the natural or moral world.

He farther argues, that to suppose a providence extending to individuals, and particular occasional interpositions, “is to suppose that there are as many providences as there are men:” or, as he elsewhere expresseth it, that “common providence would break into a multitude of particular providences for the supply of wants, and grant of petitions †.” But there is no real foundation for this pretence. There is one universal providence, which may be considered as extending to particular persons and cases, all of which are perfectly known to God, and (as was before hinted) occasion no confusion or distraction in his infinite mind. Our author indeed declares, that “they who have attempted to shew that God may act by particular and occasional interpositions, consistently with the preservation of the general order, appear to him quite unintelligible ‡.” If it were so, our not being able distinctly to shew how particular occasional interpositions may consist with the doctrine of a general providence, would be no argument at all against it: since, as he himself observes upon another occasion, “It is impertinent to deny the existence of any phenomenon, merely because we

\* Bolingbroke’s Works, vol. iii. p. 468.

† Ibid. p. 420.

‡ Ibid. p. 414.

“ cannot account for it \*.” And yet we may easily conceive in general, that they are perfectly reconcileable, since, as hath been already hinted, these occasional interpositions are usually no more than the applications of the general laws of providence to particular cases and circumstances. That there may be, or that there have been, such interpositions, he does not pretend absolutely to deny : but, he says, that “ we have no foundation for them in “ our own experience, or in any history except that of the bible †.” And yet soon after observes, that “ every religion boasts of many instances, wherein the divine providence has been thus exercised ‡.” And certain it is, that this hath been the general sentiment of mankind. Besides the ordinary course of things, which is to be regarded as under the constant care and direction of a sovereign providence, there have been events of a remarkable and uncommon nature, though not properly miraculous, of which there are accounts in the most authentic histories, and in which men have been apt to acknowledge a special interposition of divine providence. The most important events have been brought about by the seemingly smallest and most unlikely means. Things have been often strangely conducted through many intricate turns to produce events contrary to all human expectation. Actions have been over-ruled to effects and issues quite opposite to the intentions of the actors. The most artful schemes of human policy have been strangely baffled and disappointed. Surprising changes have been wrought upon the spirits of men, and restraints laid upon their passions, in a manner that can scarce be accounted for, and upon which great events have depended. Such things have naturally led mankind to acknowledge a divine hand, and a providence, over-ruling human affairs. I am sensible many of those who honour themselves with the title of free-thinkers will be apt to ascribe this to superstition or enthusiasm. But what right have they to pronounce against the general sentiments of mankind, and which seem to have arisen from the observation of events which argue the over-ruling interposition of a superior invisible agency ?

He observes with a sneer, that “ there is many an old woman

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iii. p. 468.

† Ibid. vol. v. p. 414.

‡ Ibid. p. 413.

“ who

“ who is ready to relate, with much spiritual pride, the particular providences that attended her and hers\*.” As to the charge of spiritual pride, it is no more than he hath advanced against all that believe a particular providence, interesting itself in the affairs of men; the belief of which he imputeth to *high notions of human importance*. That he himself had high notions of his own sagacity cannot be doubted; but the sentiments he is pleased to ascribe to the old woman, seem to me to be more reasonable, and would, if generally entertained, have a much better influence on mankind than his own. Is it not much better, and more agreeable to reason and nature, for dependent creatures to regard the benefits they receive, and the good events which befall them, as owing to the interposition of a most wise and benign providence, and to acknowledge with thankfulness the condescending care and goodness of God, in such instances; than to pass them over with a regardless eye, from an apprehension that God doth not concern himself with the affairs of men; that he is utterly unmindful of individuals, and taketh no notice of their actions, or of the events that relate to them? And this is the goodly scheme which this author hath taken so much pains to establish.

But he urgeth, that it is of no use to acknowledge particular interpositions of divine providence, since they cannot be distinguished from events that happen in the course of God's general providence. “ The effects,” saith he, “ that are assumed of particular providences, are either false, or undistinguishable from those of a general providence, and become particular by nothing more than the application which vain superstition or pious fraud makes of them †.” And he observes, that this holds with respect to the case not only of particular persons, but of collective bodies. “ Their circumstances are so nearly alike, and they return so often to be equally objects of these supposed providences, that no man will dare to determine where these providences have been, or should have been employed, and where not ‡.” It appears then, that though he sometimes seems to acknowledge the care of divine providence as extending to collective bodies, though not to individuals, yet in reality

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 413. † Ib. p. 420. See also p. 450.

‡ Ibid. p. 460.



he does not admit that providence interposes with regard to the one more than the other; or that in either case we can justly ascribe any of the events that befall men, whether individually or collectively considered, to divine providence; since we cannot discern or distinguish in what events providence has been employed, and in what not. But the truth is, we need not be put to the difficulty of thus distinguishing, if we believe that providence is really concerned in them all. It over-ruleth both the affairs and events relating to nations and to particular persons, disposing and governing them in the fittest matter, according to what seemeth most fit to his infinite wisdom, to which all circumstances are perfectly known. And even where the events seem contrary, prosperous to one nation or particular person, adverse to another, providence is to be regarded in both. For we can never err in judging that all events whatsoever are under the wise direction and superintendency of a sovereign providence, though, when we undertake to assign the particular reasons of God's providential dispensations, we may easily be mistaken.

Our author farther objecteth against the doctrine of a particular providence, that it supposes all mankind to be under an universal theocracy like the Jewish; and he observes, that even in that case it would not have the effect to engage men to virtue, or deter them from vice and wickedness, any more than it did the Jews\*. But he here confoundeth things that are of distinct consideration. The heathens, and all mankind in all ages, have been under the care and superintendency of divine providence, and even of a particular providence, in the sense in which we are now considering it; *i. e.* a providence, which extendeth to the individuals of the human race, inspecting their actions, and disposing and governing the events relating to them. But they were not under the Jewish theocracy, which was a peculiar constitution, established for very wise purposes, the reasons and ends of which I shall afterwards have occasion more particularly to consider. At present I shall only observe, that though under that constitution we may justly suppose there were extraordinary interpositions in a way of mercy and judgment, both national, and relating to particular persons, more frequently than there

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 430.

would have been under another constitution; yet the design of it was not, as our author supposes, that providence should interpose for giving a present immediate reward to every good man, and every good action, and for immediately punishing every bad one. We find frequent pathetic complaints even under that dispensation, of the calamities and sufferings of good men, and the prosperity of the wicked. This gave occasion to the 37th and 73d Psalms. See also Psalm xvii. 14. Jer. xii. 1, 2. The proper ultimate reward of good men, and punishment of the wicked, was still reserved for a future state of retributions, which, though not expressly mentioned in their law, was believed and expected; as appeareth from what Solomon hath said concerning it, Ecclef. iii. 16, 17. xii. 14.

I shall conclude this letter with taking notice of an observation of our author, which is designed to take off the force of an argument that Mr. Wollaston had offered. "It will be of little service," saith he, "to the scheme of particular providences, to say, like Wollaston, that there may be incorporeal, or at least invisible beings, of intellect and powers superior to man, and capable of mighty things: and that these beings may be the ministers of God, and the authors of those providences." He pretends, that there is no proof that there are such beings; and ridicules the doctrine of Genii or Dæmons, as having been owing to ancient astrologers, and the knaves or madmen that professed theurgic magic." And he argues, that "if these angels act by the immediate command of God, it is in opposition to his general providence, and to supply the defects of it; and that it is to give up the government over mankind to those beings\*." But it is with an ill grace that this writer seems here to question the existence of angels, when yet he frequently intimates, that there are many orders of beings much superior to man, and that man is of the lowest order of intellectual beings. He represents it as a thing highly probable, that "there is a gradation from man, through various forms of sense, intelligence, and reason, up to beings unknown to us, whose rank in the intellectual world is even above our conception†." And that "there may be as much difference between some other

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 463, 464.

† Ibid. p. 329, 330:

"creatures

“creatures of God and man, as there is between man and an oyster\*.” And if it be allowed, that there are created intelligences much superior to man, where is the absurdity of supposing that they are employed by divine wisdom as the instruments and agents of providence in its administrations towards the human race? Higher orders of creatures may, in the original plan of providence, be designed to assist, and exercise some superintendency over the lower. It may reasonably be conceived, that this may contribute to promote the beauty and order of the universe, and to connect the different orders of beings, and to carry on a proper intercourse between them. It is certain, that the existence, and the interposition of such beings on special occasions, have been generally believed by mankind in all ages. And it is clearly determined in the revelation contained in the holy Scripture: so that it may be now assumed not merely as a reasonable hypothesis, but as a truth that can be depended upon. Nor does the making use of angels as agents or instruments in the administrations of providence argue any *defect* of providence, as he is pleased to insinuate, which still oversees and directs the whole. For when God makes use of instruments in the course of his providence, it is not because, like human governors, he is unable to do it immediately by himself, and cannot be personally present: for he is still present to every part of the creation; and all things are under his direction and superintendency. But he is pleased to make use of some of his creatures as instruments in conferring benefits, or inflicting chastisements upon others, for the better carrying on the order and œconomy of his kingdom, and for many wise ends which we cannot pretend at present distinctly to assign.

In my next I shall consider what Lord Bolingbroke hath offered concerning the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retributions, which will let us farther into the true intention of his scheme.

I am, &c.

\* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. iv. p. 177.













